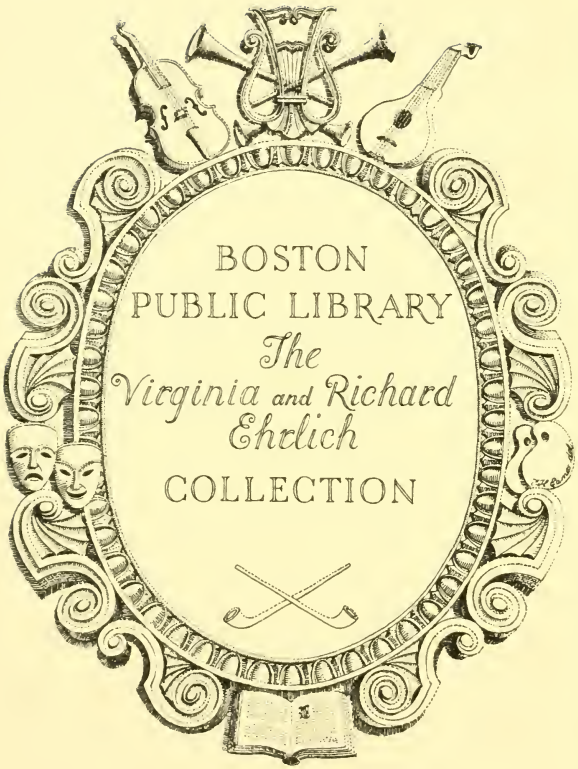
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A TERROR HE COULD NOT RESIST HELD FRANÇOIS IN ITS CLUTCHES.

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

CHICOT THE JESTER

(PART II., LA DAME DE MONSOREAU)

NEW YORK

THE CENTURY CO.

1909

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
XLI.	The Rue de la Ferronnerie . . .	401
XLII.	Prince and Friend	410
XLIII.	Etymology of the Rue de la Jussienne,	417
XLIV.	How D'Épernon had a Torn Doublet and how Schomberg was dyed Blue,	426
XLV.	Chicot is more King of France than ever	433
XLVI.	How Chicot paid a Visit to Bussy and what came of it	441
XLVII.	Chicot's Chess, Quélus' Cup-tossing, and Schomberg's Pea-shooter . .	450
XLVIII.	How the King named a Chief for the League who was neither Guise nor Anjou	458
XLIX.	How the King named a Chief who was neither the Duc de Guise nor the Duc d'Anjou	465
L.	Eteocles and Polynices	473
LI.	Which proves that rummaging in Empty Closets is not always a Waste of Time	481
LII.	Ventre Saint-Gris	488
LIII.	The Friends	495
LIV.	The Lovers	500
LV.	How Bussy might have had Three Hundred Pistoles for his Horse, and parted with him for Nothing .	508

CHAPTER		PAGE
LVI.	The Duc d'Anjou's Diplomacy . . .	514
LVII.	Saint-Luc's Diplomacy	520
LVIII.	How Rémy rode like the Wild Huntsman and answered like the Sober Spartan	527
LIX.	The Flight of the Angevines . . .	535
LX.	Roland	541
LXI.	What M. de Monsoreau came to announce	548
LXII.	How King Henri learned of his Beloved Brother's Flight, and what followed	555
LXIII.	How Chicot agreed with the Queen Mother, and how the King agreed with both	565
LXIV.	In which it is proved that Gratitude was one of Saint-Luc's Virtues .	573
LXV.	Saint-Luc's Plan	581
LXVI.	How M. de Saint-Luc showed M. de Monsoreau the Lunge the King had shown him	588
LXVII.	In which the Queen Mother enters Angers, but not in a very Triumphant Fashion	593
LXVIII.	Great Issues often have Small Causes,	600
LXIX.	How Monsoreau opened and shut his Eyes and opened them again, thereby proving he was not Dead . .	607
LXX.	How the Duc d'Anjou went to Méridor to congratulate Madame de Monsoreau on the Death of her Husband, and how he was received by M. de Monsoreau	613
LXXI.	The Inconvenience of Litters that are too Wide and Doors that are too Narrow	620
LXXII.	How the King received Saint-Luc when he appeared at Court . . .	627
LXXIII.	In which are met Two Important Personages whom the Reader has lost Sight of for Some Time	633

CHAPTER		PAGE
LXXIV.	How Bussy pursued a Party of Friends and Enemies by riding in Front of them	640
LXXV.	The Arrival of M. d'Anjou's Ambassador at the Louvre and his Reception therein	647
LXXVI.	Which is only the Continuation of the Foregoing — curtailed by the Author on Account of it being near the End of the Year . . .	652
LXXVII.	How M. de Saint-Luc fulfilled the Commission given him by Bussy .	660
LXXVIII.	Showing how Saint-Luc was more Civilized than Bussy, the Lessons he gave him, and the Use made of them by the Fair Diane's Lover	667
LXXIX.	The Precautions of M. de Monsoreau	672
LXXX.	A Visit to the House at Les Tournelles	678
LXXXI.	The Watchers	685
LXXXII.	How the Duc d'Anjou signed, and how, after signing, he spoke . .	691
LXXXIII.	A Promenade at Les Tournelles . .	701
LXXXIV.	In which Chicot falls Asleep . . .	706
LXXXV.	In which Chicot wakes	711
LXXXVI.	Corpus Christi	717
LXXXVII.	Which will make the Preceding Chapter Clearer	724
LXXXVIII.	The Procession	733
LXXXIX.	Chicot I.	739
XC.	Principal and Interest	744
XCI.	What happened near the Bastile while Chicot was paying his Debts in the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève .	750
XCII.	The Assassination	756
XCIII.	How Brother Gorenflot found himself more than ever between a Gibbet and an Abbey	770

CHAPTER		PAGE
XCIV.	In which Chicot guesses why D'Épernon had Blood on his Feet and None in his Cheeks	777
XCV.	The Morning of the Combat . . .	784
XCVI.	Bussy's Friends	790
XCVII.	The Combat	798
XCVIII.	Conclusion	803

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

Chicot had good legs. He would have made the most of them on the present occasion, and have managed to come up with the man who had beaten Gorenflot, if something singular in his appearance, and especially in his companion's, had not suggested that there might be danger in any sudden attempt to find out who they were; for, apparently, they wished to avoid being recognized. Indeed, the two fugitives were plainly trying to get lost in the crowd, turning round only at the street corners to make sure they were not followed.

Chicot thought that, in his case, the best way not to seem to be following them was to precede them. The two men made their way to the Rue Saint-Honoré by the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Tirechappe; at the corner of the latter he got ahead of them and continued to run until he found a hiding-place at the end of the Rue des Bourdonnais.

The two men went up the Rue Saint-Honoré. Keeping close to the houses along the corn-market, their hats slouched over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, they marched on, with a quick step in which there was something military, in the direction of the Rue de la Ferronnerie. Chicot continued to have the start of them.

At the corner of the Rue de la Ferronnerie they stopped afresh for a final look around.

During all this time Chicot was still in the lead, and had now reached the middle of the street.

There, in front of a house so old that it seemed falling to pieces, was stationed a litter, drawn by two clumsy-looking horses. A single glance told the Gascon that the driver had fallen asleep on his seat and that a young woman, apparently

anxious, was peering through the blind; the thought flashed through his mind that the litter was waiting for the two men. He stole up behind it, and, protected by his own shadow, as well as by that of the house, he managed to creep under a wide stone bench, used by the green-grocers for the display of their wares twice a week, at which times they had a market in the Rue de la Ferronnerie.

He had just concealed himself when the two men appeared in front of the horses, where they halted, evidently in an uneasy frame of mind.

One of them tried to wake up the coachman, and, as the latter slept like a log, he let fly a *cap dé diou!* at him, in an accent there was no mistaking, while the other, still more impatient, pricked him in the rear with his poniard.

"Oho!" said Chicot, "I was not mistaken, then; they are fellow-countrymen of mine; I am no longer surprised at the dressing Gorenflot received for speaking ill of the Gascons."

The young woman, as soon as she recognized the men she was waiting for, leaned her head quickly out of the window of the heavy machine. When Chicot had a clearer view of her, he saw she must be between twenty and twenty-two; she was very beautiful and very pale, and, if it had been daylight, the dampness of her golden hair, the dark circles round her eyes, the deadly whiteness of her hands, and her air of general languor, would have told the observer that she was in the grasp of a malady of which her frequent swoons and the enlargement of her figure would have very quickly revealed the secret.

But all Chicot perceived was that she was young, fair, and pale.

The two men approached the litter, and so were naturally placed between it and the bench under which the Gascon was crouching.

The taller of them took in both his hands the white hand which the lady stretched out toward him from the litter, resting his foot on one of the steps and his arms on the portière.

"Well, darling," said he, "how is my little heart, my own little pet, to-day?"

The lady answered by shaking her head, with a sad smile, and showing her flask of salts.

"Still those fainting-fits, *ventre saint-gris!* How angry I should be with you for being so ill, my love, if I were not the cause myself of your sweet malady!"

"Then why the devil did you bring madame to Paris?" said the other man, rather rudely. "It has been the curse of your whole life that you must have a petticoat tagged on to your doublet wherever you go."

"Ah! my dear Agrippa," answered the man who had spoken first and who was apparently the husband or the lover of the lady, "it is so great a grief to part from one you love."

And the lady and he exchanged looks full of amorous languor.

"*Cordioux!* but you do drive me crazy with your talk! you do, upon my soul!" answered his sour comrade. "Did you come to Paris to make love, my fine wooer? I should think Béarn was wide enough for your sentimental promenades, without continuing them in this Babylon, where you have been near getting both our throats cut a score of times to-night. Go back home, if you must spend your time sparking at the curtains of litters; but here, *mordioux!* the only intrigues you must deal in are political intrigues, my master."

At the word "master" Chicot would have liked to raise his head; but he could scarcely risk such a movement without being seen.

"Let him growl away, darling, and don't you bother about what he says. I believe he would fall as sick as you are and would have the vapors and swoons you have, too, if he were stopped from growling."

"But, at least, *ventre saint-gris*, to use your own oath," cried his cross-grained comrade, "get into the litter and say your soft things to madame there. You will run less risk of being recognized there than out here in the open street."

"You are right, Agrippa," said the amorous Gascon. "You see, darling, he is not so bad an adviser as he seems. There, make room for me, my love, if, though you are no longer able to take me on your lap, you will allow me to sit by your side."

"Not only do I permit it, sire, but I ardently desire you to do so."

"Sire!" murmured Chicot, who, carried away by a thoughtless impulse, raised his head and bumped it painfully against the sandstone bench, "sire! what does all this mean?"

But during this time, the happy lover profited by the permission granted, and the creaking of the litter announced an increase of its burden.

Then the sound of a lingering, tender kiss succeeded to the creaking.

"*Mordioux!* but man is the stupid animal!" cried his companion, who remained outside the litter.

"Hang me if I understand anything of this!" muttered Chicot. "But I have only to wait; everything comes to him who knows how to wait."

"Ah! how happy I am!" exclaimed the person addressed as "sire," paying not the slightest regard to his friend's impatience, to which he was evidently long accustomed. "*Ventre saint-gris*, but to-day has been the fine day; here are my good Parisians, who detest me with all their souls and would kill me without mercy if they knew where to pounce upon me, here are my Parisians doing their very best to smooth my way to the throne, and I hold in my arms the woman whom I love! Where are we, D'Aubigné? I wish, when I am king, to erect a statue on this very spot to the genius of the Béarnais."

"Of the Béarn" —

Chicot came to a standstill. He had just made a second bump by the first one.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire, and it smells anything but nice," answered D'Aubigné, who was always in ill-humor, and, when he grew tired of finding fault with men, at once set about finding fault with things.

"It seems to me," continued Henri — for our readers have already doubtless recognized the King of Navarre — "it seems to me that I have a clear vision of the whole course of my life, that I see myself king, seated on the throne, strong and powerful, but, perhaps, less loved than I am at the present moment, and that my eyes can embrace the future, even to the very hour of my death. Ah! my love, tell me again that you love me, for my heart melts at the sound of your voice!"

And the Béarnais, yielding to a feeling of melancholy that sometimes took hold of him, sighed profoundly and let his head fall on his mistress's shoulder.

"Good heaven!" cried the young woman, in alarm, "are you ill, sire?"

"Capital!" said D'Aubigné, "our fine soldier, fine general, and fine king in a fainting-fit!"

"No, darling, do not be frightened," said Henri; "if I were to faint at your side it would be with happiness."

"In good sooth, sire," grumbled D'Aubigné, "I do not

know why you should sign yourself 'Henri de Navarre,' you should sign 'Ronsard' or 'Clement Marot.' *Cordioux!* how is it you cannot get along with Madame Margot when you are both so fond of poetry?"

"Ah! D'Aubigné, for mercy's sake do not speak of my wife. *Ventre saint-gris!* speak of — But you know the proverb. What if we happened to run across her?"

"Although she is in Navarre, is she not?"

"*Ventre saint-gris!* am I not there, too? or am I not, at least, thought to be there? Agrippa, you made me shiver all over. Come in here and let us return."

"By my faith, no," said D'Aubigné; "you go on and I'll follow. I should only bore you, and, what is a good deal worse, you would be sure to bore me."

"Well, shut the door, you Béarnais bear, and you can do as you like afterward."

Then, addressing the coachman:

"Lavarenne, you know where!" said he.

The litter moved away slowly, followed by D'Aubigné, who, though he scolded his friend, was determined to watch over his king.

This departure freed Chicot from a terrible apprehension, for, after such a conversation with Henri, D'Aubigne was not the kind of man to let the imprudent person who heard it live.

"Let us see," said Chicot, creeping on all fours from under his bench, "ought I to tell the Valois of what has just occurred?"

And Chicot straightened himself up to banish the stiffness that had got hold of his legs.

"And why should he know it?" continued the Gascon. "Two men in hiding and a woman with child! It would be cowardly. No, I will say nothing; the important point is that I know it myself, since, after all, it is I who really reign."

And Chicot, quite by himself, indulged in a few merry antics.

"There was something taking about the lovers," Chicot went on. "Still, D'Aubigné is right; for a monarch *in partibus*, this dear Henri de Navarre of mine drops into love quite too often. A year ago he returned to Paris, Madame de Sauve being the attraction. To-day he is followed thither by this charming

little creature, who is addicted to swooning. Who the devil can she be? La Fosseuse, probably. And then, I think if Henri de Navarre really and truly and seriously aims at the throne, he should give a few of his thoughts to the task of destroying his enemy the Balafré, his enemy the Cardinal de Guise, and his enemy my own beloved Duc de Mayenne. Well, well, I rather like this Béarnais, and I am pretty sure he will do an ill turn, some day or other, to that odious Lorraine butcher. I have my mind made up; decidedly I am not going to say a word of what I have seen and heard to-day."

At this moment a band of drunken Leaguers passed, howling: "Hurrah for the Mass! Death to the Béarnais! To the stake with Huguenots!"

However, the litter was then turning the corner of the wall of the Holy Innocents Cemetery and was soon lost in the Rue Saint-Denis.

"And now," said Chicot, "let me go over what I have seen: I have seen the Cardinal de Guise, I have seen the Duc de Mayenne, and I have seen King Henri de Navarre; there is only one other prince lacking in my collection, the Duc d'Anjou; I must search every hole and corner until I find him. Now, *ventre de biche!* where is my François III.? I have set my heart on getting a glimpse of that illustrious sovereign."

And Chicot started again on the road to the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

Chicot was not the only one in search of the Duc d'Anjou, or the only one disturbed by his absence. The Guises also were seeking for him on every side, but they were not more successful than M. Chicot. M. d'Anjou was not the man to venture on imprudent risks, and we shall see later on what precautions kept him out of the way of his friends.

Once Chicot thought he had come on him in the Rue Béthisy: a numerous group was standing at the door of a wine-seller's shop, and in this group Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and M. de Guise.

"Good," said he, "the remoras are here; the shark ought not to be far off."

Chicot was mistaken. M. de Monsoreau and the Balafré were employed, at the door of a tavern that was gorged with drunkards, in offering bumpers to an orator whose stammering eloquence was being stimulated in this fashion.

This orator was Gorenflot, Gorenflot dead drunk, Gorenflot

relating his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a horrible emissary of Calvin.

M. de Guise was paying the closest attention; he believed there were certain coincidences between the facts narrated by the speaker and the silence of Nicolas David.

The Rue de Béthisy was at this moment thronged with people. Several gentlemen Leaguers had fastened their horses to a sort of public stable, rather common in most of the streets at this period. Chicot stopped behind the group stationed before this stable and listened.

Gorenflot, tossing backward and forward, incessantly tumbling off Panurge and again steadied in his saddle, Gorenflot speaking only in hiccoughs, but unfortunately speaking all the same, was evidently becoming a plaything in the hands of the duke and M. de Monsoreau, who were drawing out of him scraps of fact, fragments of a confession.

Such a confession filled Chicot with far more terror as he listened than had done the presence of the King of Navarre in the Rue de la Ferronnerie. He felt sure that in another moment Gorenflot would pronounce his name, and that name would light up the entire mystery with a fatal glare. He lost no time, however. In an instant he cut or unfastened the bridles of several horses, and cudgelling a couple of them furiously, sent them galloping and neighing among the crowd, which broke up and scattered in every direction.

Gorenflot was alarmed on account of Panurge; the gentlemen were alarmed on account of their horses and valises, and many were alarmed on account of themselves. The assembly was soon on the run; the cry of "fire!" was raised, repeated by a dozen voices. Chicot passed, quick as lightning, through the different groups, and approaching Gorenflot fastened on him a pair of flaming eyes that almost sobered the monk. He took hold of the bridle of Panurge, and, instead of following the crowd, turned his back on it, so that there was soon a wide space between Gorenflot and the Duc de Guise, a space that was instantly filled by those curious people who always flock where a sensational incident occurs, and generally when it is over.

Then Chicot dragged the monk to the back of a blind alley by the church of Saint Germain l' Auxerrois, and propping him and Panurge up against the wall, as a sculptor might have done with a bas-relief, if he desired to incrustate it in stone:

"Ah! you drunkard!" he cried, "you pagan! you traitor and renegade! you will always prefer, then, a jug of wine to your friend, will you?"

"Oh! M. Chicot," stammered the monk.

"What! I feed you, you scoundrel!" continued Chicot, "I liquor you, I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray your master!"

"Oh! Chicot," said the monk, moved to tears.

"You betray my secrets, wretch!"

"Dear friend."

"Hold your tongue; you are but a sycophant, and you deserve to be chastised."

And the monk, vigorous and strong, powerful as a bull, but overcome by repentance, and especially by wine, made no defence, and allowed Chicot to shake him as if he were a balloon full of air.

Panurge alone protested against the violence done his master by kicks which reached no one and which Chicot amply repaid with his stick.

"I chastised!" murmured the monk, "your friend chastised, dear M. Chicot!"

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, "and you 're going to receive your punishment on the spot."

And in a moment, the Gascon's stick passed from the ass's crupper to the monk's broad and fleshy shoulders.

"Ah! if I were only fasting!" exclaimed Gorenflot, with a gesture of rage.

"You would beat me! beat me, your friend! you ingrate!" said Chicot.

"You my friend, M. Chicot, and yet murder me in this way!"

"Who loveth well, chastiseth well."

"Then, you may as well kill me off at once," cried Gorenflot.

"The very thing I ought to do."

"Oh! if I were but fasting!" repeated the monk, with a deep groan.

"You said that before."

And Chicot redoubled the proofs of his friendship for the poor Genevievan, who began to roar with all his might.

"There! I'm through now, so you and Panurge come along to the *Corne d'Abondance*, where you will be put to bed neatly."

"I cannot see my way," said the monk, from whose eyes big tears were running.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "if you could weep the wine you drank, that might sober you up a little, perhaps. But no; just as usual, I must act as your guide."

And Chicot led the ass by the bridle, while the monk, clinging with both hands to the pommel, made every effort to preserve his centre of gravity.

In this way they crossed the Pont aux Meuniers, the Rue Saint-Barthélemy, the Petit-Pont, and ascended the Rue Saint-Jacques, the monk still weeping and the Gascon still tugging at the bridle.

Two waiters, aided by Maître Bonhomet, on the order of Chicot, helped the monk off his ass and conducted him to the apartment with which our readers are already acquainted.

"It is done," said Maître Bonhomet, returning.

"He's in bed?" asked Chicot.

"He's snoring."

"Splendid! but as he will awake some day or other, remember that I do not wish he should know how he came here; not a word of explanation about the matter to him. It would n't be a bad thing even if he were to believe that he has never been outside here since the famous night when he created such a scandal in his convent, and if he took all that has happened in the interval for a dream."

"As you please, Seigneur Chicot," answered the innkeeper. "What has befallen this poor monk?"

"A great misfortune. It appears that at Lyons he quarrelled with an agent of M. de Mayenne and killed him."

"Great heavens!" cried the host, "so that" —

"So that M. de Mayenne has sworn that he will have him broken alive on the wheel," answered Chicot.

"You may rest easy, monsieur; I 'll take care he does n't leave here under any pretext whatever."

"Nothing can be better, Maître Bonhomet — And now," said the Gascon to himself, "that I have nothing to fear about Gorenflot, I must absolutely find the Duc d'Anjou, and I must set about it at once, too."

And he took his way to the hotel of his majesty François III.

CHAPTER XLII.

PRINCE AND FRIEND.

As we have seen, Chicot searched vainly for the Duc d'Anjou through the streets of Paris on the night of the League.

The Duc de Guise, it will be remembered, had invited the prince to meet him; this invitation had disturbed his suspicious highness. François had reflected, and, when he reflected, François surpassed the serpent in prudence.

However, as his interest required that he should see what took place that evening, he decided at length to accept the invitation, but he was also determined not to put a foot outside his palace unless he were well and duly attended.

As every man who is afraid appeals for help to his favorite weapon, so the duke sought for his sword; now, his sword was Bussy d'Amboise.

The duke must have been seized by strong apprehensions before making up his mind to take that step. Since his deception of Bussy in regard to M. de Monsoreau, Bussy had kept out of his way, and François acknowledged in his heart that, if he were in Bussy's place and were possessed of Bussy's courage, he should have felt more than contempt for a prince who had betrayed him so cruelly.

For that matter, Bussy, like all fine natures, felt pain more keenly than pleasure. It is rare that a man, fearless in the presence of peril, cold and calm when confronting fire and sword, does not give way to grief more readily than a coward. Those from whom a woman can draw tears most easily are those who are most to be feared by men.

Bussy was, in fact, paralyzed by his great sorrow. He had seen Diane received at court, recognized as Comtesse de Monsoreau, admitted by Queen Louise into the circle of her ladies of honor. He had seen a thousand curious eyes riveted on her unrivalled beauty, which he had, so to speak, discovered and rescued from the tomb in which it lay buried. During the whole evening he had kept his eyes fixed on the young woman, who never raised hers, and, throughout all the splendor of that festival, Bussy, unjust, as is every man who truly loves, Bussy, forgetful of the past and destroying in his own mind all the phantoms of happiness to which that past had

given birth, Bussy never asked himself whether she, too, did not suffer from keeping her eyes thus lowered; she who beheld before her a face clouded with sympathizing melancholy amid all those other indifferent or stupidly inquisitive faces.

"Oh!" said Bussy to himself, seeing that it was useless to expect even a glance from her, "women have cleverness and audacity only when they want to deceive a husband, a guardian, or a mother; they are awkward, or cowardly, when they have simply a debt of gratitude to pay; they are so much afraid of seeming to love, they attach such an exaggerated value to their slightest favor, that, in order to drive to despair the man who has for them a reverential love, they do not mind breaking his heart, if the whim seize them. Diane could have said to me frankly: 'I thank you for what you have done for me, M. de Bussy, but I do not love you.' The blow would have either killed or cured me. But no, she prefers letting me love her hopelessly; but she has gained nothing thereby, for I no longer love her; I despise her."

And he departed from the royal circle with rage in his heart.

At this moment, his was no longer that noble face which all women gazed on with love, and all men with terror; the brow was dull, the eye false, the smile sinister.

On passing out, Bussy was suddenly confronted by his own reflection in a large Venetian mirror, and was appalled by that reflection.

"I am mad," said he; "why, for a woman who disdains me, should I render myself odious to a hundred who think well of me? But why does she disdain me, and for whom?

"Is it for that long, livid skeleton, who, always by her side, watches her incessantly with his jealous eyes, and who also feigns not to see me? If I wished it, I could, in a quarter of an hour, hold him mute and cold under my knee with ten inches of my sword in his heart; if I wished it, I could splash that white robe with the blood of him who has embroidered it with flowers; if I wished, seeing that I cannot be loved, I might, at least, be feared and hated!

"Yes! Yes! Her hatred rather than her indifference!

"Ah! But to act thus would be base and paltry; to act thus would be to act as a Quélus or a Maugiron would act, if a Quélus or a Maugiron knew how to love. Far better to

resemble that hero of Plutarch whom I have admired so much, that young Antiochus dying of love, yet never telling his love, never uttering a complaint. Yes, I will be silent! Yes, I who have fought hand to hand with the most formidable swordsmen of the age; I who have seen the brave Crillon himself disarmed before me, and who have held his life at my mercy; yes, I will crush down my sorrow and stifle it in my soul, as did Hercules with the giant Antheus, never allowing him to touch once with his foot, Hope, his mother. No, nothing is impossible to me, Bussy, who, like Crillon, is surnamed 'the brave;' and all that those heroes have done I will do."

And, after saying these words, he relaxed the convulsive hands with which he was tearing his breast, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and moved slowly toward the door. He was about to strike rudely at the tapestry; he preached to himself patience and gentleness, and passed out, a smile on his lips, calmness on his brow, a volcano in his heart.

It is true that, meeting the Duc d'Anjou on his path, he turned away his head, for he felt that, with all his firmness of soul, he could not go so far as to smile on, and even salute, the prince who had so shamefully betrayed him.

When passing, the prince uttered the name of Bussy, but Bussy ignored him.

Bussy returned home. He placed his sword on the table, drew his poniard from its sheath, unfastened his cloak and doublet, and sat down in a large armchair, resting his head on the coat of arms that adorned its back.

His attendants saw that he was lost in thought; they believed he wished to rest, and retired.

Bussy did not sleep; he dreamed.

He spent several hours in this fashion, unwitting that, at the other end of the room, a man, seated like himself, was observing him keenly, without making a single gesture, without uttering a single word, waiting, in all probability, for some excuse to enter into relations with him.

At length an icy shiver shook Bussy's shoulders and gave a wandering look to his eyes; the observer did not move.

Soon the count's teeth chattered, his arms stiffened, his head, growing too heavy, slipped along the back of the chair, and fell upon his shoulder.

Immediately, the man who was examining him rose up with a profound sigh and approached him.

"M. le Comte," said he, "you have a fever."

The count raised his head, empurpled by the fever's heat.

"Ah! it is you, Rémy," said he.

"Yes, count, I was waiting for you here."

"Here, and why?"

"Because a man does not stay long where he suffers."

"Thanks, my friend," said Bussy, taking the young man's hand.

Rémy held in his own hands that terrible hand, now weaker than a child's, and pressed it affectionately and respectfully to his heart.

"Now, M. le Comte," said he, "the question is whether you wish to remain in your present condition or not. Do you desire this fever to gain entire control of you? Then you may stay up. Do you desire to get the better of it? Then you must go to bed and have some fine book read to you from which you will draw example and strength."

The count had nothing in the world to do except obey; he obeyed.

It was, therefore, in bed that all his friends who came to see him found him.

During the whole of the following day Rémy never left the count's bedside. He exercised a double function, that of physician for the body and that of physician for the soul. For the one he had refreshing drinks; for the other, soft words.

But on the following day, the day on which M. de Guise came to the Louvre, Bussy looked round him; Rémy was not there.

"He is worn out, poor boy!" thought Bussy, "and it is quite natural in one for whom air, sunlight, the springtime, must be necessities; and then, doubtless Gertrude was expecting him. Gertrude is only a maid-servant, but she loves him — A maid-servant who loves is higher than a queen who does not love."

The day passed and Rémy did not appear. His very absence made Bussy long for his presence; he began to feel angry and impatient.

"Ah!" he murmured, "and I who still believed in gratitude and friendship! Henceforth I will believe in nothing."

Toward evening, when the streets were filling up and every sort of rumor was flying around, when the disappearance of daylight rendered it impossible to distinguish objects in his

apartment, Bussy heard loud and numerous voices in the antechamber.

A servant ran in, terrified.

"The Duc d'Anjou, monseigneur," said he.

"Show him in," answered Bussy, frowning at the thought that his master should trouble himself about him; that master whom he so thoroughly despised.

The duke entered. Bussy's chamber was unlighted. When hearts are sick they love darkness, for they can people the darkness with phantoms.

"It is too dark here, Bussy," said the duke· "you must find it unpleasant."

Bussy was silent; disgust closed his lips.

"Are you so seriously ill, then," continued the duke, "that you do not answer?"

"Yes, I am very ill, monseigneur," murmured Bussy.

"That is the reason, I suppose, I have not seen you for the last couple of days?" said the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur," answered Bussy.

The prince, piqued at these short answers, took two or three turns round the room, looking at the sculptures that stood out in the dim light, and handling the tapestry.

"You are well lodged, at least in my opinion," said the duke.

Bussy made no reply.

"Gentlemen," said the duke to his attendants, "pray remain in the next room; you see my poor Bussy is decidedly ill. But why has not Miron been sent for? The doctor of a king is not too good for Bussy."

A servant of Bussy shook his head; the duke noticed the movement.

"Come, Bussy, is anything preying on your spirits?" asked the duke, almost obsequiously.

"I do not know," answered the count.

The prince stole near him, like one of those rebuffed lovers, who, the more he is rebuffed, becomes the more insinuating and caressing.

"Now, now, Bussy, speak to me," said he.

"And what am I to say, monseigneur?"

"You are angry with me, are you not?" said the prince, in a low tone.

"I angry! why? Besides, it is of no use to be angry with princes. What good could it do?"

The duke was silent.

"But," said Bussy, "we are wasting time in preambles. To the point, monseigneur."

The duke looked at Bussy.

"You have need of me, have you not?" said the latter, harshly.

"Oh, M. de Bussy!"

"I repeat it, you have need of me, beyond a doubt. Do you fancy I believe your visit prompted by friendship. No, *pardieu!* for you love nobody."

"Oh, Bussy! you to say such things to me!"

"Come, let us have an end of it; speak, monseigneur; what do you want? When you happen to serve a prince and this prince practises upon you to the point of even calling you his friend, of course you ought to be grateful to him for his dissimulation and make every sacrifice for his sake, even that of your life. Speak."

The duke blushed; but it was dark, and no one saw the blush.

"I wanted nothing of you, Bussy," said he, "and you are mistaken if you think my visit interested. I desire only, seeing what fine weather we 're having and that all Paris is out to sign the League, that we might take a little stroll together through the city."

Bussy looked at the duke.

"Have you not Aurilly?" said he.

"A lute-player!"

"Ah, monseigneur! you do not give him all his titles; I was under the impression he performed other offices for your highness. Moreover, you have ten or twelve other gentlemen whose swords I hear clanking on the floor of my antechamber."

The hangings were raised slowly.

"Who is there?" asked the duke, haughtily, "and who dares to come into a room in which I happen to be, unannounced?"

"I, Rémy," answered the young man, entering coolly, and showing no embarrassment whatever.

"Who is Rémy?" inquired the prince.

"Rémy, monseigneur," replied the young man, "is the doctor."

"Rémy," said Bussy, "is more than a doctor, monseigneur, he is a friend."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke, in a tone of wounded feeling.

"You heard what monseigneur wishes, did you?" asked Bussy, preparing to get out of bed.

"Yes, about having a little stroll together, but" —

"But what?" said the duke.

"But he must not go, monseigneur," answered Le Haudouin.

"And why so?" inquired François.

"Because it is too cold outside, monseigneur."

"Too cold?" said the duke, astonished that any one should dare to resist him.

"Yes, too cold, and, consequently, I who am responsible for M. de Bussy to his friends, and particularly to myself, forbid him to go out."

All this, however, would not have prevented Bussy from jumping out of bed had not the hand of Rémy met his in a significant clasp.

"Very well," said the duke. "If he runs so great a risk by going out, he can stay at home."

And his highness, exasperated to the highest degree, took two steps toward the door.

Bussy did not stir.

The duke returned to the bed.

"So," said he, "your mind is made up, you will not run the risk?"

"You see for yourself, monseigneur," answered Bussy, "the doctor forbids it."

"You ought to see Miron, Bussy; Miron is a great doctor."

"Monseigneur, I prefer a doctor who is my friend to a doctor who is a great doctor."

"In that case, adieu."

"Adieu, monseigneur."

And the duke went out with a great noise.

As soon as he was gone, Rémy, who had followed him with his eyes until he made sure he had left the hotel, ran up to his patient.

"And now, monseigneur," said he, "you must get up, and that immediately."

"Get up! Why?"

"To take a walk with me. It's too warm in this room."

"But you said awhile ago to the duke that it was too cold outside!"

"The temperature has changed since he left."

"So that" — said Bussy, sitting up and looking at him inquisitively.

"So that at present," answered Rémy, "I am convinced the air would do you good."

"I do not understand," said Bussy.

"Do you understand anything about the potions I am giving you? That does not prevent you swallowing them, however. Come, come, up with you at once. A walk with the Duc d'Anjou was dangerous; with the doctor it will be beneficial, and the doctor himself tells you so. Have you lost confidence in me? Then you had better send me away."

"All right," said Bussy, "since you wish it."

"I require it."

Bussy rose, pale and trembling.

"What an interesting paleness!" said Rémy, "what a handsome invalid!"

"But where are we going?"

"To a quarter the air of which I analyzed this very day, even."

"And this air?"

"Is sovereign for your disease, monseigneur."

Bussy dressed.

"My hat and sword," he said.

He donned the one and belted on the other.

Then the two passed out.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE RUE DE LA JUSSIENNE.

Rémy took his patient by the arm, turned to the left, entered the Rue Coquillière, and followed it as far as the rampart.

"It is strange," said Bussy, "you are leading me in the direction of the marsh of the Grange-Batelière; do you think that quarter to be healthful?"

"Oh, monsieur, a little patience," said Rémy; "we are going to turn round by the Rue Pagevin, leave on our right the Rue Breneuse, and enter the Rue Montmartre; you have no idea what a fine street is the Rue Montmartre."

"Do you imagine I am not well acquainted with it?"

"Oh, if you are acquainted with it, so much the better. I shan't have to waste my time pointing out its beauties, and, instead, I 'll lead you at once into another pretty little street. So come along, that 's all I have to say to you."

And, in fact, after leaving the Pont Montmartre on their left and walking about two hundred paces in the street, Rémy turned to the right.

"Why," cried Bussy, "you seem to have made up your mind to return to the point from which we started."

"This," answered Rémy, "is the Rue de la Gypecienne, or Égyptienne, just as you wish, a street the people are already beginning to call 'Rue de la Gysienne,' and which they will call before long 'Rue de la Jussienne,' because it is softer, and the tendency of languages, the further you advance southward, is to multiply vowels. Surely you, who have been in Poland, monseigneur, ought to be aware of this. You know the rascals never boggle at their four successive consonants, so that, when they speak, you fancy they are crunching pebbles and swearing while they 're crunching them."

"What you say is right enough," said Bussy; "but as I can hardly believe you have brought me here to lecture me on philology, tell me, in the name of goodness, where are we going?"

"Do you see yon little church?" was Rémy's sole answer. "Do you notice what a stately air it has, monseigneur, with its front on the street, and its apsis on the garden of the community? I would be ready to wager that you never remarked it before."

"In good truth," said Bussy, "I don't know that I did."

And Bussy was not the only great lord who had never entered this church of Sainte Marie l'Égyptienne, a church much loved by the common people, and also known among them as the Chapelle Quoqhéron.

"Well," said Rémy, "now that you know its name, monseigneur, and that you have made a sufficient examination of the exterior, what do you say if we enter and have a look at the stained-glass windows in the nave; they are rather curious."

Bussy turned his eyes on Le Haudouin. There was such a sweet smile on the young man's face that Bussy at once came to the conclusion he had some other object in drawing him into the church than showing him stained-glass windows, which he could not see in any case, as it was night.

There was, however, something else to see, for the interior of the church was lit up for the celebration of the office of the Blessed Virgin. There were some of those artless pictures of the sixteenth century, many of which Italy, thanks to her fine climate, has been enabled to still preserve, while amongst us, humidity on one side, and vandalism on the other, have effaced those traditions of the past, those evidences of a faith that exists no longer. The artist had painted in fresco for François I., and by his orders, the life of Saint Mary of Egypt. Now, among the most interesting incidents of that life, the painter, being a simple-minded man and also a great lover of truth, of truth historical, though, perhaps, not of truth anatomical, had, in the most prominent part of the chapel, illustrated the critical moment when Saint Mary, not having any money to pay the boatman, offers herself as a substitute for it.

It is but just, however, to say that, notwithstanding the veneration of the faithful for Mary the Egyptian, after her conversion, many honest women of the quarter thought the painter ought to have put this particular picture in some other place, or at least have treated his subject in a less veracious fashion; and the reason they gave, or rather did not give, was that certain details in the fresco attracted too often the attention of the young shop-boys who were forced by their masters to attend church on Sundays and holy days.

Bussy looked at Le Haudouin, who, having become a shop-boy for the nonce, was regarding this picture with great interest.

"Do you really imagine, now," said he, "you will kindle anacreontic fancies in my mind with your chapel of Saint Mary of Egypt? If you do, you have mistaken your man. You ought to have taken monks or students with you."

"God forbid!" answered Le Haudouin: "*Omnis cogitatio libidinosa cerebrum infecit.*"

"Well, then, what is your purpose?"

"Faith, although the place is a little dark, I think you ought to be able to see it plainly enough."

"Come, now; surely you had some other object in dragging me here than that of showing me Saint Mary's knees?"

"No, upon my word," said Rémy.

"Then I have seen all I want to see; let us leave."

"Wait awhile," said Rémy. "The office is nearly over; if we were to leave now we should disturb the congregation."

And he gently detained Bussy by taking hold of his arm.

"Ah, they are going now," continued Rémy, after a few seconds; "suppose we do as the others."

Bussy moved toward the door, visibly indifferent and absent-minded.

"What!" exclaimed Le Haudouin, "leaving the church without taking holy water? Why, really, you must be losing your wits."

Bussy walked as obediently as a child to the column within which lay the holy water font.

Le Haudouin seized the opportunity to make a sign of intelligence to a woman who, as soon as she noticed the gesture, proceeded immediately to the same column to which Bussy was going.

So it happened that at the very moment the count was stretching out his hand toward the font, which was in the form of a shell and supported by two Egyptians in black marble, another hand, somewhat large and red, but a woman's, for all that, met his own, and touched it with the purifying liquid.

Bussy could not help raising his eyes from the large, red hand to the woman's face; but as soon as he did so he recoiled and turned pale, for in the hand's owner he recognized Gertrude, half disguised by a thick black woolen veil.

He remained in the same attitude, his arm extended, forgetting to make the sign of the cross, while Gertrude passed him with a bow and vanished through the porch.

Two steps behind Gertrude, whose vigorous arms elbowed a path for her, went a woman carefully wrapped in a silk mantilla, whose youthful, elegant lines, charming foot, and delicate figure reminded him that there was only one other person in the world who could boast of similar possessions.

Rémy looked at him silently; Bussy now understood why the young man had brought him to the Rue Sainte-Marie l'Égyptienne, and into the church.

Bussy followed the woman and Le Haudouin followed Bussy.

It would have been amusing to watch those four figures marching behind one another with measured tread, did not the paleness and sadness of two of them bear witness to cruel suffering.

Gertrude, still in front, turned the corner of the Rue Montmartre, advanced a few yards along the street, and then

UPON A LITTLE WOODEN BENCH BACKED AGAINST THE CHURCH WALL SAT DIANE.

suddenly passed into an alley on the right, which was closed up by a house at the end.

Bussy paused.

"I say, M. le Comte," asked Rémy, "do you wish me to tread on your heels?"

Bussy went on.

Gertrude, in advance as usual, drew a key from her pocket and opened the door of the house. Her mistress passed her, and entered, without turning her head.

Rémy said a few words to the servant, drew aside, and let Bussy pass him. Then he and Gertrude entered in turn, bolted the door, and the blind alley was once more deserted.

It was half-past seven in the evening, and near the beginning of May; caressed by the genial mildness of the air, the leaves were already beginning to expand within their bursting sheaths.

Bussy looked around him; he was in a little garden about fifty feet square, surrounded by very high walls, the summit of which was clothed with vines and ivy; from time to time the growing young shoots sent little particles of plaster falling, and gave to the breeze that strong, pungent perfume which the freshness of the night-time always extracts from their leaves.

Long gilly-flowers, merrily darting out of the chinks in the old church wall, made a brave show with their buds red as unalloyed copper.

The first lilacs which had flowered in the morning sun also fluttered the young man's still unsettled brain with their sweet emanations; he wondered if all those perfumes, all this warmth and life, had not come to him, so weak and forlorn hardly an hour ago, solely because of the presence of the woman he so tenderly loved.

Under a bower of jasmine and clematis, upon a little wooden bench backed against the church wall, sat Diane, with drooping head and arms hanging inert by her sides, bruising between her fingers a wall-flower, the leaves of which she was unconsciously breaking off and scattering on the sand.

At that moment a nightingale, concealed in a neighboring chestnut, burst into its long and doleful song, which it modulated at intervals with the most intricate and soul-subduing variations.

Bussy was alone in this garden with Madame de Monsoreau,

for Rémy and Gertrude kept at a distance. He approached her; Diane raised her head.

"M. le Comte," said she, in a timid voice, "all dissimulation would be unworthy of us both; if you found me at the church of Sainte-Marie l'Égyptienne, it was not chance that brought you thither."

"No, madame," said Bussy, "it was Le Haudouin who induced me to leave my hotel without telling his object, and I swear to you I was ignorant"—

"You mistake the meaning of my words, monsieur," said Diane, sadly. "Yes, I knew it was M. Rémy led you to the church — by force, perhaps?"

"Madame," answered Bussy, "it was not by force. I did not know whom I was to see there."

"That is harsh language, M. le Comte," murmured Diane, shaking her head and looking at Bussy with eyes that were moist with tears. "Do you mean that, if you had been aware of Rémy's secret, you would not have accompanied him?"

"Oh, madame!"

"It is quite natural and proper. Monsieur, you did me a great service, and I have never yet thanked you for your courtesy. Pardon me, and accept my most heartfelt thanks."

"Madame!"

Bussy came to a dead stop. He was so stunned that he could neither find words nor ideas.

"But I wished to prove to you," continued Diane, growing more animated, "that I am not an ungrateful woman, that I have a heart that can recollect. It was I who requested M. Rémy to procure me the honor of this interview, and appointed this place for our meeting. Forgive me if I have displeased you."

Bussy laid a hand upon his heart.

"Oh, madame!" said he, "you surely do not think that!"

Ideas were beginning to come back to this poor broken heart, and it seemed as if the soft evening breeze that had brought with it such sweet perfumes and tender words was dispelling the clouds that dulled his vision.

"I know," resumed Diane, who was the stronger of the two, because she had prepared herself for this interview, "I know how much trouble you have taken in fulfilling my commission. I know all your delicacy, both know and appreciate it, you may rest assured. Imagine, then, what must have been my

sufferings at the thought that you may have misunderstood the feelings of my heart."

"Madame," said Bussy, "for the last three days I have been ill."

"Yes, I am aware of it," answered Diane, with a blush that betrayed all her interest in that illness, "and I suffered more than you, for M. Rémy, who deceived me, no doubt, led me to believe" —

"That your forgetfulness was the cause of my suffering. Ah! it is true."

"For that reason, I have felt it my duty to do as I am doing, count," continued Madame de Monsoreau, "to thank you for your devoted care and assure you of my eternal gratitude. Do you believe that I am now speaking from the very depths of my heart?"

Bussy shook his head sadly and did not answer.

"Do you doubt my words?" inquired Diane.

"Madame," answered Bussy, "those who experience a feeling of kindness for a person display that kindness in the best way they can; you knew I was at the palace on the night of your presentation at court; you knew I was before you and must have felt my gaze riveted on your person, and yet you never raised your eyes to meet mine; not by a single word, not by a single gesture, not by a single sign, did you let me know you were aware that I was there. But, perhaps, I am wrong; perhaps you did not recognize me; you had only seen me twice."

Diane's answer was a look of such sad reproach that Bussy was stirred by it in the very inmost recesses of his soul.

"Forgive me, madame," said he, "forgive me; you are not like other women, and yet you act like ordinary women. This marriage?"

"Do you not know why I was forced to conclude it?"

"Yes, but it was so easy to break it."

"It was impossible, on the contrary."

"But did nothing tell you that you had near you a man ready to devote his life to your interests?"

Diane lowered her eyes.

"It was that, especially, that frightened me," said she.

"And it was to such considerations as these that you sacrificed me! Ah! do you dream what sort of a life mine must be, now that you belong to another?"

"Monsieur," said the countess, with dignity, "I am determined that the honor of the name I bear shall not be imperilled."

"The name of Monsoreau, which, I suppose, you have taken from choice."

"You think so!" stammered Diane. "So much the better!"

Her eyes filled with tears, her head dropped again on her breast, and Bussy, moved by the sight, walked up and down in great agitation.

"Well, madame," said he, "I have now become what I was before, a stranger to you."

"Alas!" said Diane.

"Your silence is enough to tell me so."

"I can only speak by my silence."

"Your silence, madame, is the continuation of your reception of me at the Louvre. At the Louvre you would not see me; here you will not speak to me."

"At the Louvre I was in the presence of M. de Monsoreau, under the eyes of M. de Monsoreau, and he is jealous."

"Jealous! Great God! Whose happiness can he envy, then, when everybody envies his?"

"I tell you he is jealous, monsieur; for some few days he has seen a person rambling round our new building."

"Then you have left the little house in the Rue Sainte-Antoine?"

"What!" cried Diane, carried away by an unguarded impulse, "then it was not you?"

"Madame, since the announcement of your marriage, since your presentation at the Louvre, in short, ever since you did not deign to honor me with a glance, I have been in bed, devoured by the fever of which I am dying. You must see, therefore, that your husband cannot be jealous of me, since I am not the person he has found prowling about his house."

"Well, monsieur, if it be true, as you have just told me, that you felt some desire to see me again, you may thank this stranger, for, knowing M. de Monsoreau as I know him, this man frightened me on your account, and I wished to say to you: 'Do not expose yourself thus, do not render me even more unhappy than I am already.'"

"You need not be alarmed, madame; I assure you it was not I."

"And now, let me finish all I had to say. From dread of this man whom I do not know, but whom, perhaps, M. de Monsoreau knows, he requires me to leave Paris, so that," added Diane, holding out her hand to Bussy, "you may consider this conversation, M. le Comte, as our last. To-morrow I start for Méridor."

"You start for Méridor, madame?" cried Bussy.

"It is the only means of reassuring M. de Monsoreau," said Diane; "it is the only means of regaining my tranquillity. Besides, I detest Paris, I detest society, the court, the Louvre. I am glad to have a chance of being alone amid the memories of my girlhood. It seems to me as if, by going back to the thoughts of my early years, a little of my past happiness might drop on my head as a refreshing dew. My father accompanies me, and I shall meet M. and Madame de Saint-Luc yonder; they regret I am not near them. Adieu, M. de Bussy."

Bussy covered his face with his hands.

"So be it!" he murmured, "then all is over for me."

"What is that you say?" cried Diane, rising.

"I say, madame, that this man who exiles you, who wrests from me my last remaining hope, the hope of breathing the air you breathe, of catching a glimpse of you occasionally, of touching your robe as you pass, in short, of adoring a living being and not a shadow, I say that this man is my mortal enemy, and that, though I were to perish in the attempt, I will destroy this man with my own hands!"

"Oh! M. le Comte!"

"The wretch!" cried Bussy, "what! was it not enough he should have for wife the chastest and loveliest of human beings? No, he must be jealous in addition! He jealous! would this ridiculous and devouring monster want everything?"

"Ah! be calm, count! be calm! Good heavens! perhaps he is to be excused."

"Excused! do you defend him, madame?"

"Oh, if you knew!" said Diane, covering her face with her hands, as if, in spite of the darkness, he could see her blushes.

"If I knew?" repeated Bussy. "Ah, madame, I know only one thing — he who is your husband should think of nothing in the world except you."

"But," said Diane, in a broken voice, "if you were mistaken, M. le Comte, and if he were not my husband!"

And, after uttering these words, the young woman, lightly touching with her cold hand the burning hand of Bussy, rose and fled, light as a shadow, into one of the sombre pathways of the little garden, seized Gertrude's arm, and disappeared with her, before Bussy, mad, intoxicated, wild with delight, had time even to stretch out his arms and detain her.

He uttered a cry and staggered to his feet.

Rémy arrived barely in time to catch him in his arms and place him sitting on the bench which Diane had just left.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW D'ÉPERNON HAD A TORN DOUBLET AND HOW SCHOMBERG WAS DYED BLUE.

While Maître La Hurière was piling up signatures on top of signatures, while Chicot was entrusting Gorenflot to the safe-keeping of the *Corne d'Abondance*, while Bussy was returning to life in that blessed little garden, so full of perfumes, songs, and love, Henri, depressed by what he had witnessed in the city, angered by the preaching he had heard in the churches, furious at the mysterious compliments paid his brother Anjou, whom he had seen passing before him in the Rue Sainte-Honoré, attended by Guise and Mayenne, with a whole suite of gentlemen apparently under the command of M. de Monsoreau, — Henri, we say, was returning to the Louvre in company with Maugiron and Quélus.

The King, as usual, had set out with his four friends; but when within a few yards of the Louvre, Schomberg and D'Épernon, bored by the King's evident ill-humor, and reckoning that on such a turbulent night there must be room for pleasure and adventures, took advantage of the first brawl and disappeared at the corner of the Rue de l'Astruce.

So, while the King and his two friends went on their way along the quay, they allowed themselves to be carried along the Rue d'Orléans.

Before they had advanced a hundred steps they were in the thick of the adventures they were seeking. D'Épernon had

passed his cane between the legs of a citizen and tripped him up, sending him rolling several yards beyond him, and Schomberg had snatched off the cap of a woman he thought old, but who turned out to be young and pretty.

Both, however, had selected the wrong day for making an assault on these worthy Parisians, a class ordinarily so patient. The streets were full of that fever of revolt that suddenly sweeps on occasions through a great capital; the citizen who had been laid on his beam ends was soon on his feet, crying: "Death to the heretic!" He was a zealot, as may easily be imagined, and he rushed on D'Épernon; the woman who had lost her cap cried: "Death to the minion!" a more dangerous cry still; and her husband, who was a dyer, let loose his apprentices on Schomberg.

Schomberg was brave; he halted, spoke haughtily, and clapped his hand on his sword.

D'Épernon was prudent; he fled.

Henri had not been particularly anxious about his two minions. He knew that both of them generally managed to extricate themselves from any difficulty they tumbled into; the one by the aid of his legs, the other by that of his arms. He had then had his ramble, as we have seen, and again entered the Louvre.

He was in his armory, seated in his huge elbow chair, trembling with impatience, seeking for some good pretext to get into a rage.

Maugiron was playing with Narcisse, the King's big greyhound.

Quélus, with his hands pressed against his cheeks, was squatting on a cushion and gazing up at Henri.

"They are always going on in this way," said the King, "always plotting. At one time tigers, at another, serpents; when they do not bound they creep."

"Hang it, sire!" answered Quélus, "do you not always have plots in a kingdom? What the devil would kings' sons and kings' brothers and kings' cousins have to do if they could n't plot?"

"Hold your tongue, Quélus; what with your absurd maxims and big, puffed cheeks, you are a good deal more like a mountebank at the fair of Saint Laurence than a politician."

Quélus whirled round on the cushion and irreverently turned his back on the King.

"Come, now, Maugiron, am I right or am I wrong? Do you think it right to cajole me with rigmarole and twaddle as if I were a commonplace king, or a draper, afraid of losing his pet cat?"

"Zounds! sire," answered Maugiron, who was always on the side of Quélus, "if you are not a commonplace king, show it by proving yourself a great king. What the devil! look at Narcisse there, he's a good dog, a good-natured beast; but you just pull his ears, and see how he growls; you just tread on his paws, and see how he bites."

"Good!" said Henri, "now the other one compares me to a dog."

"No, sire, not by any manner of means," answered Maugiron, "if my words mean anything, they mean that I place Narcisse far above you, for Narcisse knows how to defend himself and you don't."

And he, too, turned his back on Henri.

"Oh, very well!" said the King, "so now I am alone. Oh, very well, go on as you are going, my worthy friends, upon whom I am accused of wasting the revenues of my kingdom. Abandon, insult, murder me; I have none but murderers around my person, I give you my word of honor. Ah, Chicot! my poor Chicot! where art thou?"

"Good!" cried Quélus, "that was all there was wanting! He's calling for Chicot now!"

"Oh, it's not surprising," answered Maugiron.

And the insolent fellow mumbled a certain Latin proverb which may be translated: "*A man is known by his company.*"

Henri frowned darkly, a flash of terrible anger illuminated his great black eyes, and, for a moment, the look with which he regarded his indiscreet friends was the look befitting a king.

But exhausted, doubtless, by this passing gleam of anger, the King fell back in his chair, and began rubbing his ear with one of the little puppies out of his basket.

At the same instant a quick step resounded in the antechamber, and D'Épernon appeared, without hat or cloak, and with his doublet all torn.

Quélus and Maugiron turned around, and Narcisse ran up, snapping at the newcomer, as if the only thing he recognized about the King's courtiers was their garb.

"Jesus!" cried Henri; "what has happened to you?"

"Sire," answered D'Épernon, "look at me. This is the way in which your Majesty's friends are treated."

"And who has treated you thus?" asked the King.

"*Mordieu!* your people, or rather, the Duc d'Anjou's people, who cried: 'Long live the League! long live the Mass! long live Guise! long live François!' — long live everybody, in short, except the King!"

"And what did you do to them to have them treat you in this manner?"

"I? nothing. What do you fancy I should think of doing to a whole people? They saw I was a friend of your Majesty, and that was enough for them."

"But Schomberg?"

"What about Schomberg?"

"Did not Schomberg come to your help? Did not Schomberg defend you?"

"*Corbœuf!* Schomberg had enough to do to defend himself."

"How was that?"

"I left him in the grip of a dyer, whose wife's cap he had snatched off, and of five or six of his apprentices. I'm afraid he is going to have a hard time of it."

"*Par la mordieu!*" cried Henri; "and where did you leave my poor Schomberg? I will go myself to his aid," said he, rising. "People may say, and with a good deal of truth," added the King, looking at Maugiron and Quélus, "that my friends forsake me; but, at least, no one shall ever be able to say that I forsake my friends."

"Thanks, sire," said a voice behind Henri, "thanks, but I am here, *Gott verdamme mih,* got clear of them without help, but, certainly, not without trouble."

"Schomberg! it's Schomberg's voice!" cried the three minions. "But where the devil are you, Schomberg?"

"*Pardieu!* where I am, you can see me easily enough," exclaimed the same voice.

And from the dark corner of the apartment there advanced, not a man, but a shadow.

"Schomberg!" cried the King, "where have you come from, and why are you of that color?"

In fact, Schomberg, from head to foot, all over, both in every particle of his person and his garments, was of the most beautiful shade of royal blue that can be imagined.

"*Der Teufel!*" he exclaimed; "the wretches! I am no longer surprised every one ran after me."

"But what has happened?" said Henri; "if you had turned yellow, I could have explained it; it might have been the effect of fear; but blue!"

"They steeped me in a vat, the rascals! I thought at first they had soaked me in a tub of water, but it was a vat of indigo."

"*Oh, mordieu!*" said Quélus, roaring, "their sin, then, is their punishment. Indigo comes very high, and you must have carried away at least twenty crowns' worth on you!"

"Oh, yes, it's easy for you to joke. I wish I could have seen you in my place."

"And you have n't ripped up any of them?" asked Maugiron.

"I left my poniard somewhere, up to the hilt in a scabbard of flesh; but, in a minute, all was over: I was seized, lifted up, carried off, dipped in the vat, and almost drowned."

"And how did you get out of their hands?"

"By having the courage to act like a coward, sire."

"And what did you do?"

"I cried: 'Long live the League!'"

"Just like what I did," said D'Épernon, "only I cried: 'Long live the Duc d'Anjou!'"

"And so did I," said Schomberg, biting his lips; "they forced me to shout the very same words. But that is not the worst of it."

"What!" exclaimed the King, "did they make you shout anything else, my poor Schomberg?"

"No, they did n't make me shout anything else; it was quite enough as it was, God knows! But, just as I was crying, 'Long live the Duc d'Anjou'" —

"Well?"

"Guess who was passing."

"How could I guess?"

"Bussy, that damned Bussy of his, and he heard me hurrahing for his master."

"Oh, he could n't have understood what the row was about," said Quélus.

"Oh, no! could n't have understood! when he saw me up to my neck in a vat, with a dagger at my throat!"

"Surely," said Maugiron, "he must have come to your help? It 's a duty one gentleman owes to another."

"He? He appeared to be too busy thinking of something else. He was flying as if he had wings; he scarcely touched the ground with his feet."

"And besides," said Maugiron, "he may not have recognized you, perhaps?"

"As if that were likely!"

"You were blue at the time, then?"

"I should say I was!"

"Oh, in that case we must excuse him," observed Henri; "for, to tell the truth, I did not know you myself, my poor Schomberg."

"Never mind," answered the young man, whose coolness on the occasion gave token of his German origin, "we 'll meet yet somewhere else than at the corner of the Rue Coquillière, and when that day comes I won't be in a vat, either."

"As far as I am concerned," said D'Épernon, "it is the master I should like to chastise, not the lackey; I want to deal with Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou and not with Bussy."

"Yes, yes," cried Schomberg, "with the Duc d'Anjou, who would kill us with ridicule before killing us with a dagger."

"With the Duc d'Anjou, whose praises every one is singing in the streets. You heard them, sire," said Quélus and Maugiron together.

"The fact is that it is he who is now master over Paris, and not the King; you just take a walk in the streets, sire," said D'Épernon, "and you 'll see whether the people respect you a whit more than they do us."

"Ah! my brother, my brother!" muttered Henri, in a menacing tone.

"Oh, yes, sire," said Schomberg, "you cry often enough: 'my brother! my brother!' but you never adopt any measures against this same brother, and yet I am as sure as I can be that this brother of yours is at the head of a conspiracy against you."

"*Mordieu!* it is just what I was saying to these gentlemen when you entered, D'Épernon," cried Henri, "but they answered me with a shrug and turned their backs on me."

"Sire," said Maugiron, "we answered with a shrug and turned our backs on you, not because you said there was a con-

spiracy, but because we saw you had no intention of crushing that conspiracy."

"And now," continued Quélus, "we turn round again and say to you: 'Save us, sire, or rather, save yourself, for with our fall comes your death. To-morrow M. de Guise appears at the Louvre; to-morrow he will ask you to name a chief for the League; to-morrow you will name the Duc d'Anjou as you have promised; and then, with the Duc d'Anjou at the head of the League, that is to say, at the head of a hundred thousand Parisians, inflamed by the orgies of this night, the Duc d'Anjou can do whatever he likes with you.'"

"Ah!" said Henri, "so then, if I make up my mind to take some decisive step, you are resolved to support me?"

"Yes, sire," answered the young men in unison.

"Only, sire," said D'Épernon, "you must give me time to put on another cap, cloak, and doublet."

"We 're about the same height," answered Henri. "Pass into my wardrobe; my valet will furnish you with what you want."

"And you must give me time, sire, for a bath," said Schomberg.

"Pass into my bathroom, Schomberg; my attendant will take care of you."

"Sire," said Schomberg, "we may be in hopes, then, that this insult will not remain unavenged?"

Henri made a sign with his hand for silence, and dropping his head on his breast, appeared to be reflecting profoundly.

After a few moments, he said, "Quélus, find out if M. d'Anjou has returned to the Louvre."

Quélus passed out. D'Épernon and Schomberg waited for the answer of Quélus, their zeal revived to the highest point by the imminence of danger. It is not during a tempest but during a calm that sailors become mutinous.

"Sire," asked Maugiron, "is your Majesty, then, about to take the decisive step you mentioned?"

"You 'll soon know," answered the King.

Quélus returned.

"M. le Duc has not yet returned," said he.

"It is well," answered the King. "D'Épernon, go and change your clothes, and you, Schomberg, go and change your color. Do you, Quélus and Maugiron, go down to the window, and keep watch until my brother returns."

"And when he returns?" asked Quélus.

"When he returns, order all the gates to be closed. Go."

"Bravo, sire!" said Quélus.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, "I will be back in ten minutes."

"I cannot tell when I shall be back," said Schomberg. "It will depend on the nature of the dye."

"Come as soon as you can," answered Henri. "That is all I have to say to you."

"But will your Majesty remain alone?" inquired Maugiron.

"No, Maugiron, I remain with God, and am about to ask him to protect our enterprise."

"Pray to him earnestly, sire," said Quélus, "for I am beginning to believe he has an understanding with the devil to damn us all together in this world as well as in the next."

"*Amen!*" said Maugiron.

The two young men who were ordered to stand on guard left by one door; the two who were going to change their costumes passed out by another.

As soon as the King was alone, he went and knelt down on his *prie-Dieu*.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHICOT IS MORE KING OF FRANCE THAN EVER.

The hour of midnight struck. It was the hour at which the gates of the Louvre were ordinarily closed. But Henri had wisely calculated that the Duc d'Anjou would not fail to sleep to-night in the Louvre. He would do so in order to weaken the suspicions the disorders of the evening must have naturally aroused in the mind of the King.

The King had, therefore, ordered the gates to be kept open until one.

At a quarter past twelve Quélus came upstairs.

"Sire," said he, "the duke has returned."

"What is Maugiron doing?"

"Watching to see whether the duke will go out again."

"There's no danger of that."

"Then" — said Quélus, with a gesture that showed the King he thought the time for action had come.

"Then — let him go to bed quietly," answered Henri. "Who are with him?"

"M. de Monsoreau and his ordinary gentlemen."

"And M. de Bussy?"

"M. de Bussy was not with him."

"Good," said the King. It was a great relief to him to know his brother was deprived of his best sword.

"What are your Majesty's orders?" asked Quélus.

"Tell D'Épernon and Schomberg to make haste and inform Monsoreau I desire to speak with him."

Quélus bowed, and fulfilled his commission with all the promptitude wherewith hatred and the desire of vengeance can inspire the human heart.

Five minutes later, D'Épernon and Schomberg entered, the one newly garbed, the other partially scrubbed clean of the dye, except here and there in little facial cavities, by the bathing attendant, who had assured him it would take several hot vapor baths to restore him to his pristine condition.

After the two minions came M. de Monsoreau.

"The captain of your Majesty's guard has just informed me that you did me the honor to command my presence," said the grand huntsman, bowing.

"Yes, monsieur," said Henri, "yes, when I was out walking this evening there was such a fine moon and the stars were so brilliant that it struck me we were going to have splendid weather to-morrow, just the sort needed for a glorious hunt. It is only midnight, M. le Comte; you will, then, start for Vincennes at once. Have a stag roused for me, as we 'll hunt to-morrow."

"But, sire," said Monsoreau, "I was under the impression that on to-morrow you had an appointment with Monseigneur d'Anjou and M. de Guise for the purpose of naming a chief of the League."

"And suppose I had, what follows, monsieur?" said the King, in that haughty tone to which it was so hard to reply.

"I was — thinking — sire," stammered the count, "that, perhaps, there would be no time"—

"There is always time, monsieur, for him who knows how to make use of it, and for that very reason I now say to you: you have time to start to-night, provided you start at once; you will have time to rouse a stag to-night and to have everything in readiness for ten to-morrow. Go, then, this very in-

stant! Quélus, Maugiron, see that the gate of the Louvre is opened for M. de Monsoreau, by my order, by order of the King; and, when he is outside, see that it is shut, also by order of the King."

The grand huntsman retired in amazement.

"Is this a whim of the King?" he asked the two young gentlemen in the antechamber.

"Yes," they answered, curtly.

M. de Monsoreau saw there was nothing to be got by further inquiry, and he was silent.

"Oho!" he murmured, with a glance in the direction of the Duc d'Anjou's apartments, "all this makes it look as if a storm were brewing for his royal highness."

But to give the prince a hint of how matters stood was impossible; Quélus stood on the right of the grand huntsman and Schomberg on his left. For a moment he believed the two minions had special orders in his regard and were holding him prisoner, and it was only when he heard the gate closing behind him that he was sure his suspicions were not well founded.

At the end of ten minutes Schomberg and Quélus were back with the King.

"Now," said the King, "perfect silence, and do you four follow me."

"Where are we going, sire?" said the ever-cautious D'Épernon.

"Those who come will learn," was the King's answer.

"Forward, then!" said the four young men together.

The minions saw to their swords, fastened their cloaks, and followed the King, who, with a lantern in his hand, led them along the secret corridor we are so well acquainted with, and through which, on more than one occasion, we have seen the queen mother and King Charles IX. make their way to the apartments of their daughter and sister Margot, the same apartments that were now, as we have stated already, tenanted by the Duc d'Anjou.

A *valet de chambre* was on duty in the corridor, but, before he had time to warn his master, Henri seized him by the hand and cautioned him to be silent. He then passed him over to his followers, who thrust him into a closet and locked the door on him.

Henri himself opened the door of the room in which the Duc d'Anjou slept.

The duke had just gone to bed, his brain full of the ambitious dreams excited by the events of the past evening. He had heard his own name cheered to the skies, while that of the King had been hooted and insulted. Under the guidance of the Duc de Guise, he had seen himself and his gentlemen received in triumph by the people of Paris, while the King's gentlemen were hissed and reviled. Never before, during the course of a long career, secret plotting, timid conspiring, and subterranean intrigue, had he made such an advance in popularity, and, consequently, in hope.

He had just laid down a letter on the table. It was a letter brought to him by M. de Monsoreau from the Duc de Guise, in which he was urged to let nothing hinder him from being present at the King's levée next morning.

The Duc d'Anjou had no need of such advice; he was only too anxious himself not to miss the hour of his triumph.

But his surprise was great when he saw the door in the secret lobby open, and his terror grew overwhelming when he perceived that it was the King who opened it.

Henri made a sign to his companions to remain on the threshold, and advanced toward the bed, grave, frowning, not uttering a word.

"Sire," stammered the duke, "the honor your Majesty does me is so unexpected" —

"That it has frightened you, eh?" said the King. "Yes, I can easily understand that. No, no, stay where you are, brother, do not rise."

"But, sire, only — permit me," answered the duke, trembling, and drawing to him the Duc de Guise's letter, which he had just been reading.

"You were reading?" inquired the King.

"Yes, sire."

"What you were reading must have been very interesting, since it kept you awake till such an advanced hour in the night?"

"Oh, sire," answered the duke, with a haggard smile, "nothing very important — the little gossip of the evening."

"Oh, of course," said Henri, "I understand all that — the little gossip of the evening, a little message from Venus; but no, I am mistaken; the little notes brought by Iris or Mercury are never sealed with such big seals as I see on that one."

The duke hid the letter entirely away.

"What a discreet creature this dear François of mine is!" exclaimed the King, with a smile so hideous that it was no wonder it terrified his brother.

However he made an effort and tried to regain a little self-confidence.

"Does your Majesty wish to say anything to me in private?" asked the duke, who had just perceived the four gentlemen on the threshold and noticed that they were enjoying the opening of the scene.

"Whatever I might have to say in private, *monsieur*," answered the King, emphasizing the last word, which was the ceremonial title given to the brothers of the King of France, —"whatever I might have to say in private shall to-day be spoken before witnesses. Do you hear, gentlemen?" he continued, turning to the four young men. "Listen attentively; the King permits you."

The duke raised his head.

"Sire," said he, with that malignant and venomous look which was the index of his serpent nature, "before insulting a man of my rank you should have refused to receive me as your guest in the Louvre; in the Hôtel d'Anjou I should, at least, have had it in my power to answer you."

"Indeed!" said Henri, with his terrible irony; "you forget, then, that wherever you are, you are my subject, and that wherever one of my subjects happens to be, he is in my house; for, thank God, I am the King! King of the entire land!"

"Sire," cried François, "I am in the Louvre, the home of my mother."

"And your mother's home is my home. Come, a truce to words; monsieur, give me that paper."

"What paper?"

"The one you were reading, of course! The one open on your night table which you hid when you saw me."

"Sire, reflect," said the duke.

"On what?" asked the King.

"On this: the demand you are now making, while quite worthy of one of your police officers, is utterly unworthy of a gentleman of honor."

The King grew livid.

"That letter, monsieur!" said he.

"A woman's letter, sire, reflect!" exclaimed François.

"There are women's letters which it is very useful to see and very dangerous not to see; witness those written by our mother!"

"Brother!" said François.

"That letter, monsieur!" cried the King, stamping on the floor, "or I'll have it torn from you by my Swiss!"

The duke leaped out of bed, holding the crumpled letter in his hand, evidently intending to reach the fireplace and throw it into the fire.

"You would do this to your brother?" said he.

Henri guessed his intention and at once stood between him and the chimney-piece.

"Not to my brother," said he, "but to my deadliest enemy. Not to my brother, but to the Duc d'Anjou, who has spent the whole evening running through the streets of Paris behind the tail of M. de Guise's horse! To my brother, who is now trying to conceal from me a letter from one of his accomplices, the Lorraine princes."

"This time," said the duke, "your police have made a mistake."

"I tell you I saw the three merlets of Lorraine on the seal, those famous merlets that aspire to swallow the lilies of France. Give it up, *mordieu!* Give it up, or"—

Henri advanced a step toward the duke and laid a hand on his shoulder.

No sooner did François feel the pressure of the royal hand, no sooner did he observe, by a side glance, the menacing attitude of the four minions, who were making ready to draw their swords, than he dropped on his knees, falling back against the side of the bed, and cried:

"Help! save me! help! My brother wants to kill me."

These words, uttered in tones of deep and heartfelt terror, impressed the King and extinguished his anger, especially because they supposed that anger greater than it really was. He believed that François really was afraid of being assassinated, of a murderous attack which would be a fratricide. Then his brain grew dizzy at the thought that in his family, a family accursed as are all the families of a race just about to expire, it had become a tradition that brother should assassinate brother.

"No," said he, "you are wrong, brother; I will not do you any injury of the kind you fear. You have struggled; now

acknowledge that you are beaten. You know the King is your master; even if you were ignorant of it before, you know it now. Well, then! confess as much, not only to yourself, but aloud, before the world."

"I confess it, brother, I proclaim it," cried the duke.

"Very well. Now for the letter. The King orders you to give up the letter."

The Duc d'Anjou dropped the paper.

The King picked it up, and, without reading it, folded and slipped it into his pocket-book.

"Is that all, sire?" asked the duke, with his malignant look.

"No, monsieur," answered Henri, "as a punishment for this rebellion, which, luckily, has had no unpleasant consequences, you will have the goodness to keep your room until my suspicions in your regard are completely dissipated. You are here in a comfortable apartment with which you are quite familiar and which has not at all the look of a prison; you will stay here, then. You will have good company, at least outside the door, and, for to-night, these four gentlemen will guard you; to-morrow morning they will be relieved by a Swiss guard."

"But can I not see my own friends?"

"Whom do you call your friends?"

"M. de Monsoreau, of course, and M. de Ribeirac, M. Antraguet, and M. de Bussy."

"Oh, yes; the latter, of course, especially."

"Has he had the misfortune to displease your Majesty?"

"Yes," answered the King.

"When?"

"Always, and particularly to-night."

"To-night? What has he done to-night?"

"He has been the means of getting me insulted in the streets of Paris."

"You, sire?"

"Yes, me, or my faithful friends, which is the same thing."

"Bussy has been the occasion of some one being insulted in the streets of Paris to-night? You have been misinformed, sire."

"I know what I am talking about."

"Sire," cried the duke, with an air of triumph, "M. de Bussy has not left his hotel for the last two days! He is ill in bed, shivering with fever."

The King turned to Schomberg.

"If he was shivering with fever," said the young man, "then he was shivering in the Rue Coquillière, and not in his hotel."

"Who told you," asked the Duc d'Anjou, rising, "that Bussy was in the Rue Coquillière?"

"I saw him."

"You saw Bussy abroad?"

"Yes, Bussy, looking fresh, hale, and hearty, apparently the happiest man in the world; he was in the company of that follower of his, Rémy, his squire or doctor, hang me if I know which."

"Then I am entirely in the dark," said the duke, bewildered. "I saw M. de Bussy in the evening; he was in bed. He must have been deceiving me."

"No matter," said the King. "M. de Bussy will be punished like the others, and with the others, when this affair is cleared up."

The duke, who fancied a good means of diverting the anger of the King from himself would be to turn it on Bussy, said nothing further in defence of his gentleman.

"If M. de Bussy has acted thus," said he, "if, after refusing to accompany me, he went out alone, it was doubtless because he had designs which, knowing my devotion to your Majesty, he could not confess to me."

"You hear what my brother asserts, gentlemen; he asserts that he has not influenced M. de Bussy in any respect."

"So much the better," said Schomberg.

"Why so much the better?"

"Because then, perhaps, your Majesty will allow us to act as we like in the matter."

"Well, well, we'll see as to that later on," said Henri. "Gentlemen, I recommend my brother to your care. You will have him under your guard during the rest of the night; show him all the respect which is due to him as a prince of the blood, that is to say, as the first person in the realm next to myself."

"Oh, sire," answered Quélus, with a look that sent a shiver through the duke's veins, "do not be uneasy; we know all we owe to his highness."

"'T is well; adieu, gentlemen," said Henri.

"Sire," cried the duke, more alarmed at the King's depart-

are than he had been at his arrival, "can it be that I am seriously a prisoner? Is it possible that my friends cannot visit me and that I am not allowed to go out?"

And the thought of the next morning flashed through his mind, that morning when his presence was so absolutely necessary to M. de Guise.

"Sire," said the duke, who saw that the King was wavering, "let me, at least, remain near your Majesty; my proper place is at the side of your Majesty; I am your prisoner there quite as much as elsewhere, and more immediately under your eye than elsewhere. Pray, sire, grant me the favor of staying with your Majesty."

The King saw no real danger in yielding to the Duc d'Anjou's request, and he was just on the point of saying "Yes," when his attention was distracted from his brother and drawn toward the door by the appearance of a very long and very nimble body, which, with arms, and head, and neck, and everything it could stir, was making the most violent negative gestures that any one could invent and execute without dislocating his bones.

The gesticulating body was that of Chicot.

"No," answered Henri, "you are very well here, brother, and here you must stay."

"Sire," stammered the duke.

"It seems to me it should satisfy you to learn that such is the good pleasure of the King of France, monsieur," added Henri, with an air of imperiousness that completed the duke's dismay.

"Did I not say I was the true King of France?" murmured Chicot.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW CHICOT PAID A VISIT TO BUSSY AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

On the morning after the day, or rather the night, whose events we have been describing, Bussy was quietly breakfasting at nine o'clock, with Rémy, who, as his physician, had seen to it that the most nourishing eatables were on the table; they were discussing the events of the evening, and Rémy was trying to recall the legends of the frescoes in the little church of Saint Mary of Egypt.

"I say, Rémy," asked Bussy, suddenly, "do you think you recognized the gentleman they were dipping in a vat when we passed the corner of the Rue Coquillière?"

"I think I have seen him somewhere before, M. le Comte, and ever since I perceived him I have been trying to remember his name."

"But you did not recognize him fully?"

"No, monsieur; he was already quite blue."

"I ought to have rescued him," said Bussy; "gentlemen should always aid one another against clowns; but, in good truth, Rémy, I was too much taken up with my own affairs."

"Well," said Rémy, "though we did not recognize him, he certainly recognized us, who had our natural color, for his eyes rolled frightfully and he shook his clinched fist at us, evidently accompanying the gesture with a threat."

"Are you sure of that, Rémy?"

"I am sure about his eyes, but not so sure about his fist or the threat," answered Le Haudouin, who knew the irascible temper of Bussy.

"Then we must find out who the gentleman is; I cannot let such an insult as that pass."

"Wait, wait a moment," cried Le Haudouin, who, having made one blundering admission, apparently thought to better it by making another, "I have it! I know who he was!"

"How do you know it?"

"I heard him swear."

"I can easily believe you, *mordieu;* any one would swear in such a position."

"Yes, but he swore in German."

"Bah!"

"He said: '*Gott verdamme.*'"

"Then it was Schomberg."

"The very man, M. le Comte; the very man."

"Then, my dear Rémy, you had better prepare your salves."

"Why?"

"Because you 'll have to do a little patching up on my skin or on his before long."

"You will not be so mad as to get killed, now that you are in such good health and so happy," said Rémy. "Egad! though Saint Mary of Egypt has restored you to life once, she might get tired if you asked a second miracle of her, especially as Christ himself only performed that sort of miracle twice."

"On the contrary, Rémy," answered the count, "you have no idea how much it adds to a man's happiness, when he is really happy, to stake his life against the life of another man. I assure you I have never had any real pleasure in fighting when I had lost large sums at the gaming-table, or discovered the treachery of a mistress, or was conscious of some fault on my own part. But, on the other hand, when my purse was full, my heart light, and my conscience clear, I have always gone merrily and boldly to the field. At such times I am perfectly sure of my hand, can read every thought in my opponent's eyes, and I crush him with my good fortune. I am in the position of a man playing a game of chance and who has such a run of luck all the time that he feels as if a gale of fortune was blowing all his antagonist's gold in his direction. That is the time I feel glorious, the time I am sure of myself and ready for everything and anything. I ought to be able to fight splendidly to-day, Rémy," said the young man, holding out his hand to the doctor, "for, thanks to you, I am very happy!"

"Do not be in such a hurry, if you please," said Le Haudouin; "in fact, you must really abandon the pleasure you have set before you. A beautiful lady of my acquaintance has recommended you to my care, and has made me swear to keep you safe and sound. She maintains that you owe her your life and that no one has a right to make away with what he owes."

"My good Rémy!" said Bussy, and then he fell into one of those vague reveries in which the lover sees and hears everything that is said and everything that is done, but as if behind the opaline gauze of a theatre, through which objects are perceived without their angles and the crudity of their tones: a delicious state that is almost a dream, for while pursuing the sweet and pleasing fancies that spring to life in the soul, we have our senses distracted by the words or gestures of a friend.

"You call me your 'good Rémy' because I brought you to see Madame de Monsoreau, but I wonder whether you are likely to call me so when you are separated from her, and, unfortunately, the day of parting is approaching, if it has not come already."

"What do you mean?" cried Bussy, energetically. "No jesting on that subject, Maître le Haudouin."

"Faith, monsieur, I am not jesting; are you not aware that she is on the point of starting for Anjou, and that I, too, am about to lose Mademoiselle Gertrude? Ah!"

Bussy could not help smiling at Rémy's pretended despair.

"You are very fond of her?" he asked.

"Certainly I am — and as for her — if you were to see how she beats me!"

"And you let her?"

"All on account of my love for science. She has forced me to invent a pomade which is a sovereign remedy for banishing blue marks."

"In that case you ought to send a few pots to Schomberg."

"Drop Schomberg; it was agreed between us to let him clean himself up in whatever fashion he likes himself."

"Yes, and let us return to Madame de Monsoreau, or rather, to Diane de Méridor, for you know" —

"Oh, yes, of course, I know."

"Rémy, when do we start?"

"Ah! just what I expected; as late as possible, M. le Comte."

"Why so?"

"In the first place, because we have in Paris our dear friend M. d'Anjou, the chief of our society, and who has got into such a mess yesterday evening that he will evidently need our help."

"And in the second?"

"In the second, because M. de Monsoreau, through a special benediction you have received from Heaven, suspects nothing, at least, as far as you are concerned, and would, perhaps, suspect something if he learned of your disappearance from Paris at the same time as his wife who is not his wife."

"Oh, what need I care what he suspects?"

"Yes, but I must care, my dear monseigneur. I feel a certain satisfaction in healing the wounds you receive in your duels; you have such consummate skill that you never receive any very serious ones. But when it comes to stabs given treacherously, especially by the daggers of jealous husbands, it is quite a different affair; they usually hit hard. You remember poor M. de Saint-Mégrin, so foully done to death by our friend M. de Guise."

"But what is the use of talking, my friend? Suppose it is my fate to be killed by M. de Monsoreau?"

"Well?"

"Well! he will kill me."

"And then, in a week, or a month, or a year after, Madame de Monsoreau will marry her husband; this will be a source of terrible anger to your poor soul, which will look down at it from above, or up at it from below, but cannot in either case do anything to hinder it, for you see it will have no body."

"You are right, Rémy; I will live."

"Well and good, but to live is not everything. Believe me, you must also follow my advice and be as polite to M. de Monsoreau as you can be. He is at present frightfully jealous of the Duc d'Anjou, who, at the very time you were shivering with fever in your bed, was promenading under the lady's windows with all the air of a successful Spanish gallant. Aurilly was with him; so of course it was the duke. Do you, then, make every sort of advances to this charming husband who is not a husband; do not even have the air of wanting to know what has become of his wife; there is no reason why you should, since you know all about her already. Act in this way, and he will spread your fame abroad as that of a young gentleman possessing the virtues of Scipio: sobriety and chastity.

"I believe you are right," said Bussy. "Now that I am no longer jealous of the bear, I should like to tame him; there would be something awfully comical in the process! Well, Rémy, you can now ask me for anything you like, there is nothing I am not ready to do for you. I am happy."

At this moment some one knocked at the door. Both stopped speaking.

"Who is there?" asked Bussy.

"Monseigneur," said a page, "there is a gentleman below who wishes to speak to you."

"To speak to me so early? — who is he?"

"A tall gentleman, in green velvet, with rose-colored stockings; he has a rather funny face, but he looks like an honest man."

"Ah!" said Bussy, "I wonder would it be Schomberg."

"He said a tall gentleman."

"Yes; it would n't be Monsoreau?"

"He said 'looks like an honest man.'"

"You are right, Rémy, it can be neither; show him in."

In less than an instant the man announced stood on the threshold.

"Good heavens!" cried Bussy, rising hastily as soon as he saw his visitor, while Rémy, like a discreet friend, withdrew into a closet.

"M. Chicot!" exclaimed Bussy.

"Himself, M. le Comte," answered the Gascon.

The air of astonishment with which Bussy stared at him meant more clearly than words could have expressed it:

"Monsieur, what have you come to do here?"

And without waiting for further questions, Chicot answered, in a tone of great seriousness:

"Monsieur, I have come to propose a little bargain to you."

"Speak, monsieur," answered Bussy, in amazement.

"What would you promise me if I rendered you a great service."

"That would depend on the service," said Bussy, a little disdainfully.

The Gascon pretended not to notice the disdain.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, sitting down and crossing his legs, "I have noticed that you did not ask me to be seated."

Bussy's face flushed.

"It will be so much," said Chicot, "to be added to my recompense when I have done you the service in question."

Bussy did not answer.

"Monsieur," continued Chicot, not put out in the slightest, "are you acquainted with the League?"

"I have heard of it," answered Bussy, beginning to pay some attention to the Gascon's words.

"Well, monsieur," said Chicot, "you must know that it is an association of honest Christians united for the object of massacring their neighbors, the Huguenots, from purely religious motives. Do you belong to the League, monsieur? I know I do."

"But, monsieur" —

"Answer yes or no."

"Will you allow me to express my astonishment" —

"I did myself the honor to ask you if you belong to the League; did you understand me?"

"M. Chicot," said Bussy, "as I do not like questions the meaning of which I do not understand, I must request you to change the conversation, and I will wait a few minutes, for courtesy's sake, before repeating that I object to questioners quite as much as to questions."

"Very well, courtesy is courteous, as my dear friend M. de Monsoreau says when he is in good humor."

At the name of Monsoreau, which the Gascon uttered without apparent intention, Bussy began to listen with some show of interest.

"Aha!" he said to himself. "Does he suspect something, and has he sent this Chicot to play the spy on me?"

Then aloud:

"Come, M. Chicot," said he, "to the point! You know we have only a few minutes left."

"*Optime!*" said Chicot; "a few minutes may often be a good deal; in a few minutes a great many things may be said. I may as well tell you, however, that there is very little reason for me questioning you, since, if you do not belong to the League now, you will soon belong to it, beyond any doubt, for M. d'Anjou belongs to it."

"M. d'Anjou! who told you that?"

"Himself, addressing my own personality, as say, or rather, write, the gentlemen of the law, as used to write, for example, my worthy and dear friend M. Nicolas David, that flaming light of the *forum Parisiense* before its extinguishment without ever a one knowing who blew it out. Now, you understand clearly that if M. d'Anjou belong to the League, you cannot help belonging to it also, you who are his right arm. The League knows too well what it is about to accept a one-armed chieftain."

"Well, M. Chicot, what follows from all that?" said Bussy, more politely than he had spoken so far.

"What follows?" rejoined Chicot. "Well, this follows: if you belong to the League, or if it is even supposed you belong to it, — and, certainly, it will be supposed, — the same thing will happen to you that has happened to his royal highness."

"What has happened to his royal highness?"

"Monsieur," said Chicot, rising and imitating the attitude assumed by Bussy a moment before, "monsieur, if you will allow me to say so, I object to questioners quite as much as to questions. I am, therefore, strongly inclined to let you meet with the same fate your master has met with to-night."

"M. Chicot," said Bussy, with a smile that contained all the excuses one gentleman could be expected to make to another, "speak, I beseech you; where is the duke?"

"In prison."

"And where?"

"In his own room. Four of my good friends guard him: M. de Schomberg, who was dyed blue, as you know, for you passed him during the operation; M. d'Épernon, who turned yellow from the fright he got; M. de Quélus, who is red from anger; and M. de Maugiron, who is pale from ennui. It is a sight well worth seeing, especially as M. d'Anjou is beginning to turn green from terror, so that we privileged folk of the Louvre are about to enjoy the spectacle of a perfect rainbow."

"So, monsieur," said Bussy, "you believe my liberty in danger?"

"Danger, monsieur? I believe that at this very moment people are on the way to arrest you, or will be shortly."

Bussy started.

"Do you like the Bastile, M. de Bussy? It is a capital place for those fond of meditation, and M. Laurent Testu, the governor, sets a rather good table for his captive pigeons."

"You think they would put me in the Bastile?" cried Bussy.

"Faith, I think there must be something very like an order in my pocket to take you there, M. de Bussy. Would you like to see it?"

And Chicot thereupon drew from a pocket in his breeches — which were wide enough to accommodate thighs thrice the size of his — a royal order in due form, ordering the body of M. Louis de Clermont, Seigneur de Bussy d'Amboise, to be seized, wherever the said body might be.

"Drawn up by M. de Quélus," said Chicot, "and it is remarkably well written, too."

"Then, monsieur," cried Bussy, somewhat moved by this friendly act of Chicot, "you are really rendering me a service?"

"Well, I rather think so," said the Gascon; "do you share my opinion, monsieur?"

"Monsieur," said Bussy, "I beg of you to treat me as an honest man. Are you saving me to-day for the purpose of exposing me to peril on some other occasion? You love the King, and the King, certainly, does not love me."

"M. le Comte," said Chicot, rising and bowing, "I am saving you solely for the purpose of saving you; and now you may think whatever you like of my action."

"But to what am I to attribute such great kindness?"

"Do you forget that I am to ask you for a recompense?"

"It is true."

"Well?"

"It is granted, monsieur, with all my heart."

"Then, some day or other you will do what I ask you?"

"Upon Bussy's honor, if it be anything that can be done."

"Oh, that is quite enough for me," said Chicot, rising; "and now, monsieur, get your horse and vanish; I'll take the order for your arrest to the persons employed on such occasions."

"You were not thinking, then, of arresting me yourself?"

"Nonsense! what do you take me for? I am a gentleman, monsieur."

"But I am forsaking my master."

"You need not feel any remorse about that, for he has already forsaken you."

"You are a worthy gentleman, M. Chicot," said Bussy to the Gascon.

"*Parbleu*, I know it," answered the latter.

Le Haudouin, who, we must render him justice, was listening at the door, entered immediately.

"Rémy!" cried Bussy; "Rémy, Rémy, our horses!"

"They are saddled, monseigneur," answered Rémy, tranquilly.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, "that young man of yours has a great deal of sense."

"Faith," said Rémy, "you never said anything truer."

And Chicot bowed to Rémy, and Rémy bowed to Chicot, in the style adopted by Guillaume Gorin and Gauthier Gargouille fifty years later.

Bussy collected a few heaps of crowns, which he stuffed into his own pockets and into those of Le Haudouin.

After this he saluted Chicot, thanked him a second time, and prepared to go downstairs.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Chicot, "but you will allow me to be present at your departure."

And Chicot followed Bussy and Le Haudouin to the little stable-yard, where a page was waiting for them with two horses, ready saddled.

"And where are we going?" asked Rémy, carelessly taking the reins of his horse in his hand.

"Why" — answered Bussy, hesitating or seeming to hesitate.

"What do you say to Normandy, monsieur?" said Chicot, who was looking on and examining the horses with the air of a connoisseur.

"No," replied Bussy, "it is too near."

"What do you think of Flanders?" continued Chicot.

"It is too far."

"I think," said Rémy, "you might as well decide in favor of Anjou, which is at a favorable distance, is it not, M. le Comte?"

"Then let it be Anjou," said Bussy, blushing.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, "as you have made your choice and are going to start"—

"This very moment even."

"I have the honor to wish you good-by. Think of me in your prayers."

And the excellent gentleman went away gravely and majestically, his immense rapier clinking against the projections of the houses.

"It is fate, monsieur," said Rémy.

"Let us push on," cried Bussy, "and perhaps we may come up with her."

"Ah, monsieur," said Le Haudouin, "if you try to assist Fate you will take from her all her merit."

And they started.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHICOT'S CHESS, QUÉLUS' CUP-TOSSING, AND SCHOMBERG'S PEA-SHOOTER.

We may as well state that Chicot, in spite of his apparent coolness, returned to the Louvre in a state of exuberant joy. He had the triple satisfaction of rendering a service to a hero like Bussy, of having taken a prominent part in an intrigue, and of having rendered it possible for the King to strike the very blow which the interests of the state demanded.

In fact, what with Bussy's head, and especially with his heart, with which we are already well acquainted, and with the organizing talent of the Guises, with which we are equally well acquainted, there was great danger that a very stormy day would burst over the good city of Paris.

All that the King had feared, all that Chicot had foreseen, happened exactly as might have been anticipated.

M. de Guise, after receiving in the morning the principal Leaguers, who had come, all with their several registers covered with signatures, — those registers which, as we saw, were kept open in the principal thoroughfares, at the doors of the chief inns, and even on the altars of the churches, — M. de Guise, after promising a chief to the League and exacting an oath from every one to recognize as chief whoever should be named by the King; M. de Guise, after holding a final conference with the cardinal and M. de Mayenne, had set out to pay a visit to the Duc d'Anjou, whom he had lost sight of at ten o'clock the night before.

Chicot had expected that some such visit would be made; and so, after leaving Bussy, he strolled about the neighborhood of the Hôtel d'Alençon, situated at the corner of the Rue Hautefeuille and the Rue Saint-André.

He was hardly a quarter of an hour there when he saw the person he was waiting for coming out of the Rue de la Huchette.

Chicot hid in a corner of the Rue du Cimetière, and the Duc de Guise entered the hotel without perceiving him.

The duke met the prince's first *valet de chambre*, who was rather anxious because his master had not returned, but suspected what had really happened; namely, that he had stayed during the night in the Louvre.

The duke asked if, as the prince was absent, he might speak to Aurilly. The *valet de chambre* answered that Aurilly was in his master's cabinet and that he was at full liberty to question him.

The duke entered the cabinet.

Aurilly, it will be remembered, was the lute-player and confidant of the prince, was acquainted with all his secrets, and knew better than any one where he was likely to be found.

Aurilly was, to say the least, quite as anxious as the *valet de chambre*. After letting his fingers wander distractedly over his lute, he would, every moment, run to the window and look through the panes to see if there was any sign of his master's return.

A messenger had been sent three times to the Louvre, and had returned with the same answer every time: monseigneur had returned very late, and was now asleep.

M. de Guise questioned Aurilly about the movements of the Duc d'Anjou.

Aurilly had been separated from his master the evening before, at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, by a crowd which increased the crush at the hostelry of La Belle-Étoile, and so had returned to wait for the duke at the Hôtel d'Alençon, not having the slightest idea that his royal highness intended to sleep in the Louvre.

The lute-player then told the Lorraine prince of the three messengers he had sent to the Louvre, and of the same identical reply that had been given to these three messengers.

"Asleep at eleven?" said the duke; "not at all probable; the King himself is up at that hour. You ought to go to the Louvre, Aurilly."

"I thought of doing so, monseigneur," answered Aurilly; "but I am afraid this sleep is but an invention he ordered the concierge to use for the benefit of troublesome visitors, and that he is on some gallant expedition in the city; in that case, his highness would be anything but pleased if we went searching for him."

"Aurilly, believe me, monseigneur has too much sense to be engaged in any such expedition on a day like this. Go to the Louvre, then, without any fear; you will be sure to find him there."

"Well, since you wish it, monseigneur, I will go; but what shall I say to him?"

"You will say to him that the meeting at the Louvre is to be at two, and that we must have a conference before coming into the King's presence. You understand, Aurilly," added the duke, with a gesture that denoted very little respect for the Duc d'Anjou, "that it is not at a time when the King is about to choose a chief for the League that his highness should be sleeping."

"Very well, monseigneur, I will beg his highness to come here."

"Where, you will tell him, I am waiting for him very impatiently. As the meeting is to be at two, many have already gone to the Louvre and there is not a moment to be lost. Meanwhile, I shall send for M. de Bussy."

"Very well, monseigneur. But in case I should not find his highness, what am I to do?"

"If you do not find his highness, Aurilly, do not make any

pretence of searching for him; it will be enough for you to tell him, later on, how eager I was to meet with him. At all events, I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter to two."

Aurilly bowed himself out.

Chicot witnessed his departure and guessed at its cause.

If the Duc de Guise should learn of the arrest of M. d'Anjou, all was lost, or, at least, the troubles that must ensue would be fraught with mischief.

Chicot saw that Aurilly went up the Rue de la Huchette, evidently intending to cross the Pont Saint-Michel; on the other hand, he himself descended the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts with all the speed of his long legs, and passed the Seine at the very moment when Aurilly had still hardly reached the Grand Châtelet.

We shall follow Aurilly, who is guiding us to the very theatre of the important events of the day.

He moved along the quays, thronged with citizens looking like men who had achieved a great triumph, and reached the Louvre, which, amid all this joyous excitement of the Parisians, retained its air of restful and austere tranquillity.

Aurilly was familiar with the men and manners of the court; he talked first with the officer at the gate, always an important personage in the eyes of news-seekers and scandal-mongers.

The officer was affable and communicative; the King had risen in the best possible humor.

Aurilly went from the officer to the concierge.

The concierge was reviewing a number of servants who had received new costumes, and was distributing among them halberds of a novel invention.

He smiled on the lute-player, answered his remark on the rain and fine weather, and, in fact, gave Aurilly the most favorable idea of the condition of the political atmosphere.

After this, Aurilly went further and ascended the grand staircase leading to the duke's apartments, saluting quite a number of courtiers on the way, who were scattered on the landings and through the antechambers.

At the door leading into his highness's apartments he found Chicot sitting on a camp-stool.

Chicot was playing at chess, all by himself, and appeared to be absorbed in some profound combination.

Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot, with his long legs, blocked up the doorway.

He was forced to tap the Gascon's shoulder.

"Ah, it is you," said Chicot, "excuse me, M. Aurilly."

"Why, what are you doing, M. Chicot?"

"Playing at chess, as you see."

"All by yourself?"

"Yes — I am studying a problem. Do you play at chess, monsieur?"

"Very little."

"Ah, yes, I know; you are a musician, and music is so difficult an art that those gifted in that way must give it all their time and all their understanding."

"Apparently the problem you are engaged on is a rather serious one," said Aurilly, laughing.

"Yes, it is my king who troubles me; you know, monsieur, that in chess the king is a very stupid, very insignificant personage; he has no will of his own, cannot take a step to the right, cannot take a step to the left, while he is surrounded with active enemies, — knights who jump three squares at a time, a crowd of pawns always around him, always at his heels, always harassing him, so that he is a badly advised sovereign; ah, faith! it looks as if, in a little time, he must be a ruined monarch. True he has his fool,[1] who goes and comes, and trots from one end of the chess-board to the other, who has the right to throw himself in front of him, or stand behind him, or beside him, as the case may be; but, the more devoted the fool is to his king, the more risk he runs, himself, and I will not conceal from you, M. Aurilly, that, at the present moment, my king and his fool are in an unpleasant predicament."

"But," asked Aurilly, "what chance has led you, M. Chicot, to study all these combinations at the door of his royal highness?"

"Because I am waiting for M. Quélus, who is inside."

"Inside? Where?"

"Why, with his royal highness."

"M. de Quélus with his royal highness?" asked Aurilly utterly bewildered.

During the dialogue, Chicot had left the way clear for the lute-player, so that, at length, Aurilly was between the jester and the door leading into the Duc d'Anjou's apartments.

Still, Aurilly hesitated about opening the door.

[1] In English chess, the bishop.

"Would you tell me," said he, "what M. de Quélus is doing with the Duc d'Anjou? I was not aware they were such very great friends."

"Hush!" answered Chicot, with an air of mystery.

Then, still holding his chess-board with both hands, he made a curve with his long person so that, without moving from the place where he stood, his lips reached the ears of Aurilly.

"He is asking pardon," said he, "of his royal highness for a little quarrel they had yesterday."

"Indeed?" said Aurilly.

"The King insisted on it. You know on what good terms the two brothers are at present. The King would not for a moment allow Quélus to be impertinent to his brother, and so Quélus was ordered to make the most humble apology to the Duc d'Anjou."

"Really?"

"Ah, M. Aurilly, I think that we are, of a truth, returning to the age of gold. The Louvre will soon be transformed into an Arcadia, and the two brothers will be *Arcades ambo*. Ah, forgive me, M. Aurilly, I am always forgetting that you are a musician."

Aurilly smiled and passed into the antechamber, while, at the same time, through the door he had opened, Chicot exchanged a significant glance with Quélus, who had probably been warned of the state of affairs beforehand.

Chicot then resumed his combinations, scolding his King in good, set terms, not more harshly than, perhaps, a king in flesh and bone would have deserved, but far too harshly for a poor little king made of ivory.

As soon as Aurilly entered the antechamber he was courteously saluted by Quélus, who held between his hands a superb cup and ball of ebony inlaid with ivory, and was making rapid evolutions with them.

"Bravo, M. de Quélus!" said Aurilly, on seeing the young man perform quite a difficult feat with them, "bravo!"

"Ah, my dear M. Aurilly," said Quélus, "shall I ever be able to toss cup and ball as skilfully as you finger the lute?"

"When you have spent as many years studying your toy," answered Aurilly, somewhat offended, "as I have spent in studying my instrument. But, by the way, where is monseigneur? Did you not speak to him this morning, monsieur?"

"I had an audience with him, my dear Aurilly, but Schomberg has tripped me up and is the favorite at present."

"What! M. de Schomberg also?" exclaimed the lute-player, more astonished than ever.

"Why, yes, of course. The King manages all that. He is yonder in the dining-room. Enter, then, M. d'Aurilly, and remind the prince that we are waiting for him."

Aurilly opened the second door and saw Schomberg sitting, or rather, reclining, on a long sofa stuffed with feathers. He was amusing himself in this position by firing little pellets of perfumed clay — of which he had ample supply in his game-bag — from a pea-shooter, and sending them through a gold ring suspended by a silken thread from the ceiling; a pet dog brought back to him all of them that were not broken against the wall.

"What!" cried Aurilly, "practising at such an exercise in the apartments of his highness! Oh, M. de Schomberg!"

"Ah! *guten morgen*, M. Aurilly," said Schomberg, interrupting for a moment his amusement; "you see I am trying to kill time while waiting for my audience."

"But where is monseigneur?" asked Aurilly.

"Hush! monseigneur is now granting a pardon to Maugiron and D'Épernon. But do you not wish to enter, you who are on such familiar terms with the prince?"

"Perhaps it might be indiscreet?" inquired the musician.

"Not at all; quite the contrary. You will find him in his art gallery. Enter, M. Aurilly, enter."

And he pushed Aurilly by the shoulders into the next apartment, where the dazed musician perceived D'Épernon stiffening his mustache with gum, before a mirror, while Maugiron, seated near a window, was cutting out of a book engravings beside which the bas-reliefs of the temple of Venus Aphrodite at Gnidos and the pictures of Tiberius at Capri would have seemed chaste.

The duke, without his sword, was seated in his armchair between these two men, who never looked at him except to watch his movements, and never spoke to him except to utter unpleasant words.

As soon as he saw Aurilly he was about to rush forward to meet him.

"Softly, monseigneur," said Maugiron, "you are treading on my pictures."

"Great heavens! what do I behold?" cried the musician; "they are insulting my master!"

"How is that dear friend of ours M. Aurilly?" said D'Épernon, all the while pointing and twisting his mustache. "He must be in pretty good condition, for he looks very red."

"Do me the favor, Mister Musician, to bring me your little dagger, if you please," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Aurilly, "do you not remember where you are?"

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed! my dear Orpheus," said D'Épernon, "and that is why my friend asks you for your poniard. You see clearly that M. le Duc has none."

"Aurilly," said the duke, in a voice choked by grief and rage, "do you not see I am a prisoner?"

"Prisoner of whom?"

"Of my brother. Surely you must have understood that when you saw the sort of persons who are my jailers?"

Aurilly uttered a cry of amazement.

"Oh, if I had suspected this!" said he.

"You would have brought your lute to amuse his highness, my dear M. Aurilly," said a mocking voice; "but I thought of that, and sent for it; here it is."

And Chicot handed the poor musician his lute. Behind Chicot were Quélus and Schomberg, yawning as if they must dislocate their jaws.

"And how is your chess getting along, Chicot?" asked D'Épernon.

"Oh, yes, how are you managing your game?" said Quélus.

"Gentlemen, I think my fool will save his King; but, *morbleu!* it will not be without some trouble. Come, M. Aurilly, give me your poniard in exchange for your lute — a fair exchange."

The frightened musician obeyed, and went and sat on a cushion at the feet of his master.

"We have caught one of them in the rat-trap already," said Quélus; "now for the others."

And with these words, which gave Aurilly some idea of how matters really stood, Quélus returned to his post in the antechamber, after asking Schomberg to exchange his pea-shooter for his cup and ball.

"It is perfectly proper," said Chicot, "to vary our amuse-

ments; and so, to diversify mine a little, I will go and sign the League."

And he closed the door, leaving the poor lute-player to bring what comfort he might to his royal highness by his presence.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF FOR THE LEAGUE WHO WAS NEITHER GUISE NOR ANJOU.

The hour of the great reception had arrived, or rather, was close at hand, for, ever since noon, the principal chiefs of the League, those who sympathized with them, and many who were simply actuated by curiosity, were making their way to the Louvre.

Paris, as turbulently inclined as on the previous night, but somewhat restrained by the presence everywhere of the Swiss, who had not taken part in the festival of the evening before, had sent to the royal residence its deputations of Leaguers, of workingmen's guilds, its municipal councillors, its citizen soldiers, and its constantly increasing masses of spectators, those spectators who, on days when the real people is devoting all its energies to the achievement of some object, suddenly spring into existence apparently for no other purpose than to surround that people and watch its action. They are so numerous, active, and eager that there would seem to be two peoples in Paris, every person, as it were, separating himself into two individualities, one of whom was engaged in acting, the other in looking on while the first acted.

Crowds of the populace surged around the Louvre; but no one trembled at the thought that its tenants were in any peril.

The day had not yet arrived when the murmurs of a people were to change to a thunder roar, when the fiery breath of its cannon was to overturn the walls of castles and bring them tumbling down on the heads of their masters; the Swiss of that day, ancestors though they were of the Swiss of the tenth of August and of the twenty-seventh of July, smiled on the armed masses of the Parisians, and the Parisians smiled back on the Swiss. The time had not yet come for the people to stain with blood the vestibules of kings.

It must not be imagined, however, that the drama lacked interest because it was devoid of the gruesome features to which we have alluded; on the contrary, the scenes of which the Louvre was on that day the theatre were among the most curious we have ever described.

The King, in the grand hall, or throne-room, was surrounded by his officers, friends, servants, and family, waiting until all the corporations should defile before him, and then, leaving their leaders behind them in the palace, should march to the positions assigned them under the windows and in the court-yards of the Louvre.

He was thus enabled, with a single glance, to embrace the entire mass of his enemies and almost to count them, especially as he was aided by hints from Chicot, who was concealed behind the royal seat, or by a warning flash in the eyes of the queen mother; sometimes the murmurs of the lowest classes of the Leaguers — more impatient than their leaders because ignorant of the secrets of their policy — told him what he had to expect. Suddenly M. de Monsoreau entered.

"I say, Harry," said Chicot, "are you looking?"

"What do you want me to look at?"

"Your grand huntsman, egad! he's well worth the trouble of being looked at. Don't you notice how pale and dirty he is? Is n't that enough to keep your eyes open?"

"Yes," said the King, "I see it is the grand huntsman."

Henri made a sign to M. de Monsoreau, who approached.

"How is it you happen to be in the Louvre, monsieur?" asked the King. "I understood you were at Vincennes, engaged in rousing a stag for our benefit."

"Sire, the stag was roused at seven in the morning; but when it struck twelve and I had no news, I began to fear some misfortune had befallen your Majesty, and I hurried back."

"Really?" asked the King.

"Sire," said the count, "if I have failed in my duty, I beg you to attribute my fault to an excess of devotion."

"I do so, monsieur," answered Henri. "You may rest assured I appreciate it."

"Now," continued the count, hesitatingly, "if your Majesty requires me to return to Vincennes, as I am no longer under any apprehension" —

"No, no; remain, M. le Grand Veneur. That hunting-party was only a sudden fancy that entered our brain; it vanished

as rapidly as it came. Remain, and do not stay far from me; I feel the necessity of having devoted friends within call, and you have just ranked yourself among those upon whose devotion I can rely."

Monsoreau bowed.

"Where does your Majesty wish me to stay?" asked the count.

"Will your Majesty give him to me for half an hour?" whispered Chicot in the King's ear.

"For what purpose?"

"To torment him a little. You owe me some compensation after forcing me to be present at such a stupid ceremony as this one you promise us is sure to be."

"All right, take him."

"I have had the honor of asking your Majesty where it is your wish I should take my stand?" inquired the count a second time.

"I thought I had answered: Wherever you like. Behind my chair, if you have no objection. It is where I station my friends."

"Come here, my worthy grand huntsman," said Chicot, making room for him, "scent me out some of those rascals yonder. That's a sort of game you can track without help of bloodhound. *Ventre de biche*, M. le Comte, what a stench! It comes from the shoemakers who are passing, or rather have passed; and next we have the tanners. *Mort de ma vie!* I tell you, grand huntsman mine, if you lose the scent of these fellows, I'll take your office from you!"

M. de Monsoreau made a pretence of listening, or rather he listened without hearing.

His mind was preoccupied by some weighty affair and he looked around him with an air of absent-mindedness which did not escape the notice of the King, especially as Chicot took good care to call his attention to it.

"Ah," said the Gascon, in an undertone to the King, "do you know what your grand huntsman is hunting at the present moment?"

"No; what is he hunting?"

"He is hunting your brother of Anjou."

"The game is not in sight, at all events," answered Henri, laughing.

"No. Do you believe he knows where it is?"

"I confess I should not be sorry if he were on the wrong scent."

"Stay a moment," said Chicot, "and I 'll have him following the wrong scent in no time. We are told the wolf smells like the fox; it is easy enough to send him on a fool's errand. You just ask him where is his countess?"

"Why should I do so?"

"Ask and you 'll see."

"M. le Comte," said the King, "pray what have you done with Madame de Monsoreau? I do not see her among the ladies of the court."

The count started as if a serpent had stung him in the foot.

Chicot scratched the end of his nose, at the same time winking at the King.

"Sire," answered the grand huntsman, "Madame la Comtesse has been ill; the air of Paris did not agree with her. She therefore left the city last night, after receiving the Queen's permission, in company with her father, the Baron de Méridor."

"And to what part of France is she travelling?" inquired the King, delighted to have an excuse for turning away his head while the tanners were passing.

"To Anjou, her native country, sire."

"The fact is," said Chicot gravely, "that the air of Paris is not good for women in her condition: *Gravidis uxoribus Lutetia inclemens.* I advise you, Henri, to imitate the example of the count and send the Queen away from here when she is in the same interesting situation" —

Monsoreau turned pale and looked furiously at Chicot, who, his elbow resting on the royal chair and his chin resting on his hand, appeared to be entirely taken up with the lace-makers, who came after the tanners.

"And who told you, you impudent fellow, that Madame la Comtesse was with child?" murmured Monsoreau.

"Is she not?" said Chicot. "I should imagine you would consider such a supposition far more impertinent than any other could be."

"Well, she is not, monsieur."

"I say, Henri, did you hear?" asked Chicot of the King. "It would seem this grand huntsman of yours has committed exactly the same fault you committed yourself. He has forgotten to bring the chemises of Our Lady together."

Monsoreau clenched his hand and swallowed his anger in silence, hurling a look of hatred at Chicot, who answered it by slouching his hat over his eyes and giving an air of defiance to the long, slender plume that drooped over his forehead.

The count saw that the moment would be badly chosen for quarrelling with the jester; he shook his head, as if he would thus dispel the clouds this dialogue had brought to his brow.

Chicot also brightened up in his turn, and, the swaggering air he had assumed for a moment giving way to a most gracious smile, he added:

"I am afraid that poor countess will never survive the journey. She will be bored to death."

"I told the King," said Monsoreau, "she was travelling with her father."

"Oh, I allow that a father is a very respectable person to travel with, but he is not always very amusing. If the poor lady had none but this excellent baron to entertain her on the road — Luckily, however, she" —

"What?" asked the count, sharply.

"What 'what' are you talking about?" answered Chicot.

"What do you mean to imply by 'luckily'?"

"Ah, you made an ellipsis, M. le Comte, when you spoke last."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"I assure you I am right, grand huntsman mine; the interrogative form you just used is called an ellipsis. If you don't believe me, ask Henri; he 's a philologist."

"Yes," answered Henri, "but what does your adverb mean?"

"What adverb?"

"*Luckily.*"

"Luckily meant luckily. Luckily was the word I used, in this admiring the goodness of God, for luckily, at the very moment I am speaking, there are some of our friends rambling along the highways, and friends of the very wittiest description, too, who, when they meet the countess, will be quite sure to amuse and entertain her; that is a dead certainty. And," added Chicot, negligently, "as they follow the same road, I should say it is rather probable that they must meet. Oh, I can see them from here. Do you see them, Henri? You ought, you are a man with a fine imagination. Dost see them prancing and caracoling along some beautiful green lane or

other, all the time saying sweet things to Madame la Comtesse, who is perfectly enchanted with them, the dear lady?"

A second dagger this, and even sharper than the first, planted in the breast of the grand huntsman.

However, he had to bear it; he could not show his anger in the King's presence, and Chicot had, for the time at least, an ally in the King. So Monsoreau, putting a terrible curb on his ill-humor, addressed the jester in tones he did his very best to render amiable.

"So M. Chicot," said he, "you have friends on their way to Anjou?"

"You might say with even more truth that *we* have, M. le Comte; for those friends are a good deal more your friends than they are mine."

"You astonish me, M. Chicot" said the count. "I know of no one who is" —

"Oh, very well; pretend to make a mystery of the matter."

"I give you my word I don't know of any."

"On the contrary, you have so many of such friends and friends so dear to you that, although you knew perfectly well they were on the road to Anjou, from mere force of habit, your eyes were wandering an instant ago over the crowd in search of them; of course a moment's reflection told you they were not here."

"You say you have seen me doing this?"

"Yes, you, the grand huntsman, and the palest grand huntsman that has ever existed, from Nimrod to M. d'Autefort, your predecessor."

"M. Chicot!"

"The palest, I repeat, — *veritas veritatum.* Although that is a barbarism, for one truth cannot be truer than another; if one truth were truer than another, then that other would be false — but you are not a philologist, dear M. Esau."

"No, monsieur, I am not; and so I must request you to come back directly to those friends of mine of whom you spoke, and to have the goodness, if your superabundant imagination will let you, to give those friends their real names."

"Ah, you are always repeating the same thing. Search, M. le Grand Veneur, search. *Morbleu!* it is your trade to rouse beasts; witness that unfortunate stag you started this morning, which never expected such an ill turn on your part. How

should you like if you were prevented from taking a nap in the morning yourself ? "

The eyes of Monsoreau again wandered anxiously over those immediately around the King.

" What ? " he cried, on noticing a place vacant by the King's side.

" What ails you ? " said Chicot.

" Where is M. le Duc d'Anjou ? " exclaimed the grand huntsman.

" Tally-ho ! Tally-ho ! " said the Gascon, " so the beast is started at last ! "

" He must have left to-day ! " cried the count.

" He *must* have left to-day," answered Chicot, " and he may have left yesterday evening. You are not a philologist, monsieur ; but you can question the King, who is one. I say, Harry, when did your brother disappear ? "

" Last night," replied the King.

" The duke has left, the duke has left," murmured Monsoreau, wan and trembling. " Ah ! great God ! great God ! What is this you tell me, sire ? "

" I do not say," rejoined the King, " that my brother has left ; all I say is that he disappeared last night, and even his best friends do not know what has become of him."

" Oh ! " exclaimed the count, wild with rage, " if I believed that "—

" And supposing you did, what could you do ? " said Chicot. " And where would be the great harm, even if he did pay a few tender compliments to Madame de Monsoreau. Our gentle friend François is the gallant of the family ; he was so during King Charles IX.'s reign, as long as that monarch reigned, and he is so now during the reign of Henri III., a prince who is kept far too busy to have time for gallantry himself. Hang it, man ! don't you know that there should be at least one prince at court capable of representing the French spirit ? "

" The duke, the duke left ! " repeated Monsoreau, " are you quite sure of this, monsieur ? "

" Are you ? " asked Chicot.

" The count again turned his eyes to the place ordinarily occupied by the prince, next his brother, but which continued vacant.

" I am ruined," he murmured, making a movement so indicative of his intention to flee that Chicot detained him.

"Will you keep quiet, man, *mordieu?* You do nothing but jump and fidget, and that harms the King, whose heart is weak. *Mort de ma vie!* should n't I like to be in your wife's place, even if for nothing else than the pleasure of seeing every day a prince with a double nose, and of hearing M. Aurilly, who plays the lute as well as the late lamented Orpheus! What luck your wife has! What luck, by Jupiter!"

Monsoreau actually shivered with fury.

"Take it quietly, though, M. le Comte," continued Chicot; "try to conceal your delight; you see the session is just opening. It is highly unbecoming for any one to reveal his feelings as you are doing; pray, attend to the discourse of the King."

There was nothing left the grand huntsman but to remain where he was standing, for, in fact, the grand hall of the Louvre was now gradually filling, and soon became thronged. He, therefore, kept quiet during the rest of the ceremony, to which he had the appearance of paying close attention.

When the whole assembly had taken their seats, M. de Guise entered and knelt on one knee before the King, not without also casting a glance of surprise and uneasiness at the empty seat of the Duc d'Anjou.

The King rose. The heralds commanded silence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC DE GUISE NOR THE DUC D'ANJOU.

"Gentlemen," said the King, amid the profoundest silence and after seeing that D'Épernon, Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quélus, replaced in their guardianship of the Duc d'Anjou by ten Swiss, had entered and taken a position behind him, "gentlemen, a king, placed as he is, so to speak, between earth and heaven, hears equally the voices that come from above and the voices that come from below, namely, what God commands and what his people command. I understand perfectly that the association of all classes in one body for the defence of the Catholic faith is a powerful guarantee of protection for my subjects. Consequently I have received, with much pleasure, the advice given me by my cousin of Guise. I de-

clare, therefore, the holy League well and duly sanctioned and instituted; and, as so great a body should have a worthy and powerful head, and as the chief whose function it will be to uphold the Church should be one of the most zealous sons of that Church, one whose zeal is naturally quickened by the very nature of the office he holds, I select a Christian prince for the leadership of this League, and I declare that henceforth this chief shall be" —

Henri paused designedly.

The buzzing of a fly could have been distinctly heard, so deep was the general silence.

Henri repeated:

"And I declare that this chief shall be Henri de Valois, King of France and Poland."

Henri, in uttering these words, had raised his voice in a somewhat affected manner, partly to mark his triumph, partly to inflame the enthusiasm of his friends, who were wild with delight, and partly to complete the dismay of the Leaguers, whose sullen murmurs revealed their discontent, surprise, and terror.

As for the Duc de Guise, he was simply panic-struck; large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He exchanged looks with the Duc de Mayenne and his brother, the cardinal, who were each standing in the midst of a group of leaders, the one on his right, the other on his left.

Monsoreau, more astonished than ever at the absence of the Duc d'Anjou, began, notwithstanding, to feel somewhat reassured in recalling the words of Henri III.

In fact, the prince might have disappeared and yet not have started for Anjou.

The cardinal, without showing alarm or surprise, left the Leaguers among whom he was standing and stole up to his brother.

"François," he whispered in his ear, "unless I am very much mistaken, we are no longer safe here. Let us hasten to take our leave, for the populace is very uncertain, and the King, whom they execrated yesterday, will be their idol for some days."

"Yes," answered Mayenne, "let us start. Do you wait here for our brother; I am going to take measures for our safe departure."

"Go, then."

During this time the King had been the first to sign the document prepared beforehand and laid on the table by M. de Morvilliers, the only person in the secret except the queen mother. Then, in that jeering tone which he adopted occasionally with so much success, he said to M. de Guise, exaggerating his ordinary nasal twang:

"Sign, pray, fair cousin."

And he passed him his pen.

Then, pointing out the place with the tip of his finger:

"There, there," said he, "beneath me always. Now hand the pen to M. le Cardinal and M. de Mayenne."

But the Duc de Mayenne was already outside the door, and the cardinal was in another apartment.

The King remarked on their absence.

"Then pass it to our grand huntsman," said he.

The duke signed, handed the pen to the grand huntsman, and was about to retire.

"Wait," said the King.

And while Quélus was taking the pen from M. de Monsoreau, with his most contemptuous air, and while not only the noblemen present, but all the chief men of the guilds, brought hither for this great event, were making haste to sign their names below that of the King, on register lists which were to form the continuation of the register lists signed the evening before by noble and clown, great and small, on terms of perfect equality, the King was saying to the Duc de Guise:

"Fair cousin, it was, if I mistake not, your opinion that our capital should be guarded by a good army composed of all the forces of the League? The army is now formed and completed in the most proper fashion, for the natural general of the Parisians is, of course, the King."

"Assuredly, sire," answered the duke, who did not very well know what he was saying.

"But I do not forget I have another army to command, and the generalship of this army belongs of right to the first warrior of my realm. While I take the command of the League, you will go, then, and take the command of the army, cousin."

"And when am I to start?" inquired the duke.

"Immediately," replied the King.

"Henri, Henri!" muttered Chicot, who had a strong desire to interrupt the King, but knew his doing so would be too great a breach of etiquette to be allowed, even in his case.

But as the King either had not heard him, or, if he had, had not understood him, the Gascon advanced with an air of great reverence, holding an enormous pen in his hand and elbowing every one aside, until he was close to the King.

"Will you hold your tongue, you double-dyed booby?" said he in a whisper; "at least, if you have an atom of sense left, you will."

But Chicot was too late.

The King, as we have seen, had already announced to the duke his nomination and was now handing him his commission, signed some time before, in spite of all the gestures and grimaces of the jester.

The Duc de Guise took the commission and retired.

The cardinal was waiting for him outside the hall, and the Duc de Mayenne was waiting for both at the gate of the Louvre.

They mounted their horses that instant, and before very many minutes had passed, all three were outside Paris.

The rest of the assembly withdrew gradually, some crying, "Long live the King!" and others, "Long live the League!"

"At least," said Henri, laughing, "I have solved a great problem."

"Oh, yes," murmured Chicot, "you are a grand mathematician, you are!"

"I think I am, really," returned the King. "You see I have forced all these rascals, whose watchwords were two entirely antagonistic cries, to have but one cry, to shout the same thing."

"*Sta bene!*" said the queen mother, grasping her son's hand.

"If you pin your faith on that, you are nicely sold," said the Gascon to himself. "The woman is simply driven crazy with joy; she thinks she has got rid of her Guises forever."

"Oh, sire," cried the favorites, noisily approaching the King, "what a sublime idea you have had!"

"They believe now that gold is going to rain on them like manna," whispered Chicot into the other ear of the King.

Henri was led in triumph back to his private apartments. In the midst of the procession that attended and followed the King, Chicot played the part of the slave in ancient times who accompanied the triumphant general in his chariot, ridiculing and reviling him.

The obstinacy of Chicot in reminding the demi-god of the day that he was but a man had, at last, such an effect on the King that he dismissed everybody but the Gascon.

"Well, now," said Henri, turning toward him, "do you know it is impossible to content you, Maître Chicot? And do you know, too, that this gets to be a bore, in the long run? Confound it, man, I do not ask you to speak to me with ordinary politeness, but I do ask you, when you speak to me, to talk common sense."

"You are right, Henri," answered Chicot, "for that is the thing of which you stand most in need."

"You will agree, at least, that the game was cleverly played?"

"The very thing to which I have n't the slightest intention of agreeing."

"Ah, King of France, your Majesty is jealous!"

"Jealous! God forbid! Whenever I am jealous, I 'll select some one more worthy of exciting that feeling than you."

"*Corbleu*, Master Fault-finder, you are coming out rather strong!"

"Your self-love and vanity make one sick, Henri."

"Come, now, will you deny that I am King of the League?"

"Most undoubtedly — I do not — Have I denied it? But" —

"But what?"

"You are no longer King of France."

"And who, pray, is King of France?"

"Every one except you, Henri; first, your brother."

"My brother! Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of M. d'Anjou, and no one else, by my faith!"

"Who is my prisoner."

"Yes, for prisoner though he be, he has been crowned, and you have not been."

"By whom was he crowned?"

"By the Cardinal de Guise. In good sooth, Henri, you do well to praise up your police; a king is crowned in Paris, in presence of thirty-three persons, in the church of Sainte Geneviève even, and you never heard a word about it."

"While you, of course, — Heaven save the mark! — know all about it!"

"Certainly, I know all about it."

"And how can you know what I do not know?"

"Oh, because you do your police work through M. de Morvilliers, while I do mine on my own hook."

The King frowned.

"We have, then, without counting Henri de Valois, a King of France called François d'Anjou, and we have also — let me see" — said Chicot, with the air of a man cudgelling his brains; "oh, yes, we have also the Duc de Guise."

"The Duc de Guise?"

"The Duc de Guise, Henri de Guise, Henri the Balafré. I repeat, then: we have also the Duc de Guise."

"A fine king, really! a king I exile, send to the army."

"Good! as if you had not been exiled to Poland; as if La Charité were not nearer to the Louvre than Cracow was to Paris! Oh, yes, you are right, you send him to the army; no one but you could plan such a deep-laid scheme; sharp as a needle you are, Henri; you send him to the army! That means you place thirty thousand men at his beck and call. *Ventre de biche!* and what an army! a true army, that — not like your army of the League — no, indeed! An army of grocers and haberdashers is good enough for Henri de Valois, King of the minions. Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers, and what soldiers! — men inured to battle, scorched by cannon, men who would make a mouthful of twenty of your armies of the League; so that if Henri de Guise, no longer satisfied with being king *de facto*, should take the idiotic fancy into his head to become king in name also, he would only have to turn his trumpets in the direction of the capital and say: 'Forward! let us make a clean sweep of Paris and of Henri de Valois and of the Louvre along with him.' They would do it, the wretches; I know what stuff they're made of."

"You forget only one thing in your argument, illustrious statesman," retorted the King.

"Oh, that's quite possible; perhaps I am forgetting a fourth king."

"No, you forget," said Henri, with supreme scorn, "that the aspirant to the sovereignty of France, especially when the reigning sovereign is a Valois, must go back a little and count his ancestors. That such an idea should come into the head of M. d'Anjou is not improbable; he belongs to a race any member of which might have such an ambition; his ancestors are mine; the only question that could create a struggle between us is the question of primogeniture. It is primogeni-

ture alone that gives me a right superior to his. But M. de Guise — Nonsense, friend Chicot, you had better go and study heraldry, and then you will be able to say which is the escutcheon of the nobler house, the lilies of France or the merlets of Lorraine."

"Aha! that is just where you make your mistake, Henri," answered Chicot.

"My mistake? Where is my mistake?"

"Undoubtedly, your mistake. M. de Guise is of a far better house than you have any notion of, and you may take my word for it, too."

"Of a better house than mine, perhaps," said Henri, with a smile.

"There is no mistake about it, my little Harry."

"You are a fool, M. Chicot."

"Oh, yes, I believe such is my title at your court."

"But I mean a fool in its true and proper sense, a shallow-pated fool. You ought to go and learn to read, my friend."

"Well, Henri," answered Chicot, "you know how to read and don't require to go back to school, as you say I do. Please read this."

And Chicot drew from his breast the parchment upon which Nicolas David had written the genealogy with which we are acquainted, the genealogy brought back from Avignon with the approval of the Pope, and in which it was shown that Henri de Guise was descended from Charlemagne.

Henri turned pale as soon as he had cast his eyes over the document and recognized, near the legate's signature, the seal of Saint Peter.

"What do you say to that, Henri?" asked Chicot; "are not your lilies thrown a little into the background? *Ventre de biche!* as far as I can see, the merlets want to fly as high as the eagle of Cæsar; beware of them, my son!"

"But how did you manage to get possession of this genealogy?"

"I? Do I bother about such things? It came in search of me by itself."

"But where was it before it found you?"

"Under a lawyer's bolster."

"And that lawyer's name?"

"Maître Nicolas David."

"Where was he?"

"In Lyons."

"And who went to Lyons to take it from under this lawyer's bolster?"

"A good-natured friend of mine."

"What does this friend of yours do?"

"He preaches."

"Then he 's a monk."

"Undoubtedly."

"And his name?"

"Gorenflot."

"What!" cried Henri, "that abominable Leaguer who delivered such an incendiary harangue in the convent of Sainte Geneviève, and insulted me yesterday in the streets of Paris?"

"Do you remember the story of Brutus, who pretended to be mad" —

"Why, then, your Genevievan monk must be a deep politician?"

"Have you not heard of Signor Machiavelli, secretary of the Florentine Republic? Your grandmother used to be his pupil."

"Then he purloined that document from the lawyer?"

"You can hardly say 'purloined;' he took it from him by force."

"Took it by force from Nicolas David, who is known to be a desperado?"

"Yes, from Nicolas David, who was known to be a desperado."

"Why, he is a brave man, then, this monk of yours?"

"As brave as Bayard!"

"And, after the performance of this fine deed, he has never come near me to ask for his reward?"

"He returned humbly to his convent, only asking for one thing, that it should be forgotten he had ever left it."

"Then he is modest also?"

"As modest as Saint Crispin."

"Chicot, on my honor as a gentleman your friend shall have the first abbey vacant," said the King.

"I thank you in his name, Henri."

Then the Gascon said to himself:

"By my faith, I can see him now between Mayenne and Valois, between a rope and a prebend. Is he likely to be

hanged, or is he likely to have the abbey? He would be a wise man who could tell.

"In any case, if he is still asleep he must have the queerest of dreams."

CHAPTER L.

ETEOCLES AND POLYNICES.

The close of this day was as tumultuous and brilliant for the League as had been its beginning.

The friends of the King were in raptures. The preachers of the League were preparing to canonize Brother Henri and were recounting everywhere the great warlike deeds of Valois, who had shown such heroism in his youth.

The favorites said: "The lion is roused at last."

The Leaguers said: "The fox has got a glimpse of the trap laid for him at last."

And, as the principal characteristic of the French people is vanity, and, as the French do not care much for leaders of inferior intelligence, the conspirators themselves were rather proud of their King for tricking them so cleverly.

The chiefs of the association had, however, sought safety in flight.

The three Lorraine princes, as we have seen, had clapped spurs to their horses and were soon out of Paris. Their principal agent, M. de Monsoreau, was about leaving the Louvre to make his preparations for departure, with the object of coming up with the Duc d'Anjou.

But no sooner was his foot on the threshold than Chicot accosted him.

The palace was now free from Leaguers, and the Gascon was no longer alarmed about his King.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, M. le Grand Veneur?" he inquired.

"To overtake his highness," the count answered, curtly.

"To overtake his highness?"

"Yes, I am uneasy about him. The present time is not such that a prince can travel safely without a considerable escort."

"Oh, yes," said the Gascon, "and our prince is so brave that he is inclined even to be rash."

The grand huntsman stared at Chicot.

"At any rate," said the latter, "I am even more uneasy than you are."

"About whom?"

"Of course, about the same royal highness."

"Why?"

"You have not heard the rumor?"

"Does not the rumor run that he has left Paris?" asked the count.

"There is a report that he is dead," whispered the Gascon in the grand huntsman's ear.

"Pshaw!" answered Monsoreau, in a tone in which there was joy as well as surprise, "did you not tell me he was on the road to Anjou?"

"Upon my soul, I was persuaded that such was the case. You see I am so sincere myself that I take for granted every story buzzed into my ears. But since then I have had good grounds for believing that, if the poor prince is on any road, he is on the road to the other world."

"Come, now, who has put this gloomy idea into your head?"

"He entered the Louvre yesterday, did he not?"

"Undoubtedly; I entered with him."

"Well, no one has seen him leave it."

"Leave the Louvre?"

"Yes."

"But Aurilly?"

"Vanished also!"

"And his gentlemen?"

"Vanished! vanished! all vanished!"

"You are having a joke at my expense, are you not, M. Chicot?" said the grand huntsman.

"Go and ask."

"Whom?"

"The King."

"But I cannot question his Majesty, can I?"

"Pshaw! there is a way of going about everything."

"At all events," said the count, "I cannot remain in such uncertainty."

And, leaving Chicot, or rather, walking in front of him, he made his way to the royal cabinet.

He was told the King had just gone out.

"Where has his Majesty gone?" inquired the grand hunts-

man. "It is my duty to give him an account of the execution of certain orders with which he honored me."

"He has gone to see the Duc d'Anjou," answered the person he addressed.

"To see the Duc d'Anjou!" said the count to Chicot; "then the prince is not dead?"

"Alas!" returned the Gascon, "if not dead, I'm afraid he is as good as dead."

This answer completed the bewilderment of the grand huntsman. He was now almost sure the Duc d'Anjou had not quitted the Louvre.

Certain reports he had heard, as well as the manner of certain officials he met, confirmed him in this opinion.

As he was ignorant of the real cause of the prince's absence at the late critical juncture, this absence astonished him beyond measure.

It was true, as he had been told, that the King had gone to see the Duc d'Anjou, but as the grand huntsman, in spite of his anxiety to learn what was passing in the prince's apartments, could not, in the circumstances, very well enter them, he was forced to wait in the corridor for whatever news might reach him.

We have stated that, in order to allow the four minions to be present at the session, their places had been taken by Swiss guardsmen; but, as soon as it was over, their desire to be disagreeable to the prince got the better of the ennui they experienced from being compelled to mount guard over him, especially as they wanted to have an opportunity of informing him of the King's triumph. Consequently, they resumed their posts, Schomberg and D'Épernon in the drawing-room, Maugiron and Quélus in his highness's bedchamber.

François, on the other hand, was terribly depressed, both by his confinement and by his anxiety as to how it would end, and it must certainly be said that the conversation of these young gentlemen was not of a character to raise his spirits.

"Really," said Quélus to Maugiron, speaking across the room just as if the prince were not there at all, "really, Maugiron, it is only during the last hour that I have begun to appreciate our friend Valois; upon my word, I believe him to be a great statesman."

"Explain your meaning," answered Maugiron, throwing himself on a sofa.

"The King spoke openly of the conspiracy. Now, as long as he was afraid of it, he dissembled, kept quiet about it. The fact that he has discussed it so frankly proves he is no longer afraid of it."

"What you say is logical," answered Maugiron.

"If he is no longer afraid of it, he will punish it; you know our Valois: he has many resplendent qualities, but certainly that of clemency does not shine among them."

"You never spoke truer."

"Now, if he punish the said conspiracy, we shall have a trial, and this trial will be a second representation of the Amboise affair, so that we are in for a good deal of enjoyment."

"Yes, it will be a fine spectacle, *morbleu!*"

"And a spectacle at which our places are already assigned us, unless" —

"What do you mean by your 'unless'?"

"Unless — and this is quite possible — unless all judicial forms are dispensed with because of the rank of the prisoners, and so everything may be done under the rose, as the saying is."

"I rather fancy," said Maugiron, "the matter will be managed that way; you see it is the manner in which family affairs are usually dealt with, and this last conspiracy is a true family affair."

Aurilly looked anxiously at the prince.

"Faith," said Maugiron, "I am pretty certain of one thing, at least; if I were King I would not spare the high heads, for, in good truth, they are twice as guilty as the others in entering on this conspiracy business. These gentlemen apparently believe they can indulge with impunity in the pleasure of conspiring. I say, then, that I would bleed one or two of them, one especially; then I would drown all the small fry. The Seine is deep in front of the Nesle, and, if I were in the King's place, I could not resist the temptation; I give you my word of honor I could not."

"In that case," said Quélus, "I think it would be no bad thing to revive the famous invention of the sacks."

"What invention was that?" asked Maugiron.

"Never heard of it? Oh, a royal invention dating from 1350, or thereabouts; you shut up a man in a sack with three or four cats and then throw the whole affair into the water.

The cats, you know, cannot endure a wetting, and are no sooner in the Seine than they set about paying off the man for the accident that happened to them. Then, certain things take place in the sack which, unfortunately, we shall not be able to see."

"In good truth," said Maugiron, "you are a well of science, Quélus, and your conversation is most interesting."

"This invention, however, cannot be applied to the chiefs. The chiefs have the right to decapitation in a public square, or to assassination in some private corner. But as to the small fry you spoke about, and by small fry I understand you to mean favorites, squires, stewards, lute-players" —

"Gentlemen," stammered Aurilly, pale with terror.

"Do not answer them, Aurilly," said François; "such words cannot be addressed to me, nor to my household, either. Princes of the blood are not a subject for such jeering in France."

"No," said Quélus, "they are treated in a far more serious fashion; they have their heads cut off. It was the mode of dealing with them affected by Louis XI., that great king! M. de Nemours was a proof of it."

The minions had got thus far in their dialogue when a noise was heard in the drawing-room, the door of the bed-chamber was opened, and the King stood on the threshold.

François rose.

"Sire," said he, "I appeal to your justice against the infamous treatment to which I am subjected by your people."

But Henri did not seem to see or hear his brother.

"Good day, Quélus," said he, kissing his favorite on both cheeks; "good day, my child, the sight of you rejoices my soul, and you, my poor Maugiron, how are we getting along?"

"I am bored to death," answered Maugiron. "I had imagined when I took charge of your brother, sire, that I should get some amusement out of him. But he is such a wearisome prince! I wonder can he really be the son of your father and mother!"

"You hear him, sire," said François. "Is it, then, your royal intention to have your brother insulted in this fashion?"

"Silence, monsieur," answered Henri, without even turning round, "I do not like to have my prisoners complaining."

"Prisoner as long as you wish; but this prisoner is not the less on that account your" —

"The title you are about to invoke is the very title that, to my mind, destroys you. A guilty brother is twice guilty."

"But if he is not guilty?"

"But he is."

"Of what crime?"

"That of displeasing me, monsieur."

"Sire," said the humiliated François, "our family quarrels should not have witnesses."

"You are right, monsieur. My friends, leave me for a moment, I wish to talk for a while with my brother."

"Sire," whispered Quélus, "it is not prudent for your Majesty to remain alone with two enemies."

"I 'll take Aurilly with me," said Maugiron, in another whisper.

The two gentlemen led out Aurilly, who was at once burning with curiosity and dying of anxiety.

"So we are now alone," said the King.

"I was waiting impatiently for this moment, sire."

"And I also. Ah! you have been aiming at my crown, my worthy Eteocles. The League was to be your means and the throne your goal. So you were anointed in a remote church in a corner of Paris; you wanted to exhibit yourself suddenly to the Parisians, all glistening with holy oil!"

"Alas!" said François, crushed by the King's anger, "your Majesty will not allow me to speak."

"Why should I do so?" answered Henri; "in order to allow you to lie, or else to tell me things with which I am as well acquainted as you are? But no, you would lie, my good brother, for to confess what you have done would be to confess that you deserve death. You would lie, and I want to spare you that shame."

"Brother, brother," said François, wildly, "is it your intention to outrage me beyond endurance?"

"Then, if what I am about to say to you is an outrage, it is I who lie, and I ask for nothing better than to have a proof that what I say is a lie. Come, speak, speak, I am ready to listen; prove to me that you are not a traitor, and, what is worse, a clumsy traitor."

"I do not know what your Majesty means, and it seems as if you were determined to speak to me only in enigmas."

"Then I am going to make my words plain," said the King, in tones of menace that rang in the ears of François; "yes,

you have conspired against me, as formerly you conspired against my brother Charles; only that formerly you conspired with the aid of the King of Navarre; now you conspire with the aid of the Duc de Guise. A fine scheme that excites my admiration and would, if successful, have given you a grand place in the history of usurpers. It is true that formerly you crawled like a serpent, and to-day would rend like a lion; after perfidy, open force; after poison, the sword."

"Poison! What do you mean, monsieur?" cried François, livid with rage, and, like the Eteocles to whom Henri had compared him, seeking a spot where he could strike Polynices with his flaming eyes, as he was powerless to do so with sword or dagger. "What poison?"

"The poison with which you assassinated our brother Charles; the poison you destined for Henri de Navarre, your associate. Oh, we all know about that fatal poison; our mother had already used it so often! That is the reason, I suppose, why you abandoned the thought of using it on me; that is the reason why you wished to pose as a captain and command the soldiery of the League. But look me well in the face, François," continued Henri, taking a threatening step toward his brother, "and learn there that a man of your cast of character will never kill a man of mine."

François staggered under the weight of this terrible attack. But, without regard or mercy for his prisoner, the King went on:

"The sword! The sword! I should like to see you alone with me in this chamber, and each of us with a sword in his hand. I have proved my superiority to you in astuteness, François, for I, too, have travelled along tortuous paths to reach the throne of France, and, while marching over these paths, I had to trample on the bodies of a million Poles to attain my object. Well and good! If you wish to show yourself my master in cunning, do so; but do so in my fashion; if you will imitate me, imitate me; but do not imitate me as a dwarf might imitate a giant. My intrigues have been royal intrigues, my craft has been the craft of a great captain. I repeat then, that in astuteness I have vanquished you, and that in a fair combat you would be slain. No longer dream of a successful contest with me in one way or the other; for from this moment I act as a King, a master, a despot; from this moment I have my eye on every one of your movements; from this moment I search you out in every one of your dark-

some retreats, and, at the least doubt, at the least suspicion, I lay my heavy hand on you, puny creature that you are, and fling you, gasping, under the axe of my executioner.

"And now you know what I had to say about our family affairs, my brother; now you know why I wished to speak with you face to face; now you know why I am about to order my friends to leave you alone to-night, so that you may have full leisure to meditate in your loneliness on my words.

"If the night, as we are told, brings good counsel along with it, it should surely bring good counsel to prisoners."

"And so," murmured the duke, "for a mere fanciful suspicion that bears a closer resemblance to a nightmare than to reality, I have lost your Majesty's favor?"

"Say, rather, you have been crushed by my justice."

"But at least, sire, fix a term to my captivity; let me know what I am to expect."

"When your sentence is read, you will know it."

"My mother! Can I not see my mother?"

"For what purpose? There were but three copies in the whole world of the famous hunting-book that killed my brother; and of the two that remain, one is in Florence and one in London. Besides, I am not a Nimrod, like my poor brother. Adieu, François."

The prince fell back on his armchair in utter despair.

"Gentlemen," said the King, again opening the door, "Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou has begged my permission to be allowed to reflect during the night on an answer he is to give me to-morrow morning. You will, therefore, leave him alone in his chamber, making him, however, such occasional visits as your prudence may dictate. You will, perhaps, find your prisoner a little excited by the conversation we have just had together; but remember that when M. d'Anjou conspired against me he renounced the title of my brother; consequently, there are none here except a captive and his guards. No ceremony, then; if the prisoner annoy you, inform me of the fact; I have the Bastile close at hand, and in the Bastile is Maître Laurent Testu, than whom there is no one in the world more fitted to control a rebellious temper."

"Sire! sire!" exclaimed François, making a final effort, "remember I am your"—

"You were also, if I do not mistake, the brother of Charles IX.," said Henri.

"But, at least, restore me my servants, my friends."

"Are you complaining? Why, I am giving you mine, although it is to me a great privation."

And Henri shut the door in the face of his brother, who staggered back, pale and trembling, and again sank into his chair.

CHAPTER LI.

WHICH PROVES THAT RUMMAGING IN EMPTY CLOSETS IS NOT ALWAYS A WASTE OF TIME.

THE scene in which the Duc d'Anjou and the King had just been actors led the prince to regard his situation as quite hopeless.

The minions had taken good care to inform him of everything that had occurred in the Louvre; they had exaggerated the defeat of the Guises and Henri's triumph, and he could hear the cries of the people shouting: "Long live the King! Long live the League!" All this was utterly incomprehensible to him, but he felt that he was abandoned by the principal leaders, and that they, too, had to defend their lives.

Forsaken by his family, which had been decimated by poisonings and assassinations, and divided by every sort of discord and animosity, he sighed as he recalled that past upon which the King had dwelt; then, in his struggle with Charles IX., he had always had for confidants, or rather dupes, those two devoted hearts, those two flaming swords, that bore the names of Coconnas and La Mole.

For many consciences remorse is but regret for lost advantages.

And yet, for the first time in his life, François, in his loneliness and isolation, did experience a kind of remorse at the thought of having sacrificed Coconnas and La Mole.

In those days his sister Marguerite had loved and consoled him. How had he rewarded that sister?

His mother, Queen Catherine, was left. But his mother had never liked him.

Whenever she had made use of him she used him as he did others, simply as an instrument.

And François, in pondering on the relative position of his

mother and himself, was candid. Once in her hands, he confessed that he was no more his own master than a ship is its own master when tossing on the ocean in the grip of the tempest.

And then he remembered that even lately he had close to him one heart that was worth a thousand hearts, one sword that was worth a thousand swords.

Bussy, the brave Bussy, came back to his memory and filled it to the exclusion of aught else.

Ah! now, most assuredly, the feeling he experienced was something like remorse. He had offended Bussy to please Monsoreau. He had wished to please Monsoreau because Monsoreau knew his secret, and lo, this secret, with which Monsoreau had threatened him, was in the possession of the King, and Monsoreau was no longer to be feared.

He had, therefore, quarrelled with Bussy uselessly and even gratuitously, a kind of action since described by a great statesman as worse than a crime, for it is a blunder!

Now, what an advantage it would have been for the prince in his present situation to be aware that Bussy, Bussy grateful and, consequently, faithful, was watching over him; Bussy the invincible; Bussy of the loyal heart; Bussy the universal favorite, for a noble heart and a heavy hand always make friends of those who have received from God the former, and from Fate the latter.

With Bussy watching over him, liberty would have been probable, vengeance would have been certain.

But, as we have said already, Bussy, wounded to the quick, had withdrawn from the prince and retired sullenly to his tent, and D'Anjou was there, a prisoner, with a depth of fifty feet to descend if he tried to reach the fosses, and four minions to disable if he tried to penetrate to the corridor.

And, moreover, the courtyards were full of Swiss and soldiers.

From time to time he went to the window and tried to sound the depth of these fosses; but the elevation was high enough to render even the bravest dizzy, and M. d'Anjou was far from being proof against dizziness.

In addition to all this, one of the prince's guards, now Schomberg, now Maugiron, at one time D'Épernon, at another Quélus, entered his chamber frequently, and acting as if he were not present, sometimes not even saluting him, went round

the apartment, opened doors and windows, searched closets and trunks, looked under beds and tables, and saw to it that the curtains were in their places and the bedclothes not cut up and twisted into ropes.

Occasionally they leaned out over the balcony; the distance of forty-five feet between it and the ground reassured them.

"By my faith," said Maugiron, after returning from one of those investigations, "I 'm through with it; I won't budge from the drawing-room, and I must not be awakened every four hours to pay a visit to M. d'Anjou."

"I 'm at one with you there," said D'Épernon. "Easy seeing we 're great big babies, who have always been captains and never soldiers. Why, hang it, man, we don't even understand our instructions!"

"How can that be?" asked Quélus.

"What I say is God's truth. What does the King want? He wants us to guard, not to *regard*, M. d'Anjou."

"So much the better," answered Maugiron, "I don't object to guarding him, but as to regarding him! Why, he 's as ugly as sin!"

"That 's all very well," said Schomberg, "but we must keep our eyes open, for all that; the rascal beats the devil for cunning."

"I agree with you there," said D'Épernon; "but it requires something more than cunning to pass over the bodies of four blades like us."

And D'Épernon, drawing himself up to his full height, proudly twisted his mustache.

"D'Épernon is right," said Quélus.

"Oh, indeed?" retorted Schomberg. "Do you think M. d'Anjou such a donkey as to try to make his escape through our gallery? If he is absolutely set on getting out, he is capable of making a hole through the wall.

"With what? He has no weapons."

"What do you say to windows?" inquired Schomberg, but rather timidly, for he himself had measured with his eyes their height above the ground.

"Ah, the windows! upon my word, you are delightful," retorted D'Épernon. "The windows! bravo, Schomberg. Of course, I know you would take a jump of forty-five feet without winking, eh?"

"I confess that forty-five feet are rather" —

"Well! and this fellow who limps, who is so heavy, who is as timid as" —

"You are yourself," said Schomberg.

"My dear fellow," answered D'Épernon, "you know perfectly well I am afraid of nothing but ghosts; it is simply a matter of the nerves."

"His nervousness," said Quélus, gravely, "is accounted for by the fact that all those he killed in his duels appeared to him on the same night."

"We ought n't to make light of it," said Maugiron; "I have read of hundreds of miraculous escapes — with the sheets, usually."

"Ah," said D'Épernon, "Maugiron's remark has some sense in it, at least. I myself saw a prisoner at Bordeaux who managed to get out by the help of his sheets."

"You see, then, a man can get out," remarked Schomberg.

"Yes," rejoined D'Épernon, "but he had his back broken and his brains dashed out for his pains. The rope he made was thirty feet too short; he had to jump for it; so that, though his body escaped from prison, his soul escaped from his body."

"Well, if he do escape," said Quélus, "we 'll have a rattling fine hunt after a prince of the blood. We 'll track him to his lair, and when we catch up with him we 'll take devilish good care that there will be some part of his princely anatomy in a broken condition at the end of the chase."

"And by heavens!" cried Maugiron, "we 'll then be acting our proper parts: we 're hunters, not jailers."

This peroration wound up the discussion, and they turned to other subjects, though it was agreed they should visit the chamber of M. d'Anjou every hour or so.

The minions were perfectly correct in their supposition that the Duc d'Anjou would never attempt to gain his freedom by violence, and that, on the other hand, he would not venture on any escape that was perilous or difficult.

Not that this worthy prince was deficient in imagination, and we may as well say that his imagination was thoroughly excited whenever he walked from his bed to the famous cabinet occupied for two nights by La Mole, after he was saved by Marguerite, during the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

From time to time the prince's pale face was glued to one of the panes of the window that overlooked the fosses of the Louvre.

Beyond the fosses stretched a sandy beach about fifteen feet wide, and, beyond the beach, the Seine could be seen through the darkness, rolling on with as smooth a surface as a mirror's.

On the other side of the river the Tour de Nesle loomed up out of the obscurity, standing like some motionless giant.

The Duc d'Anjou had watched the sunset in all its varying phases; had watched it with the interest a prisoner takes in such spectacles, in the gradual disappearance of light and the gradual coming on of darkness.

He had contemplated the wondrous spectacle afforded by old Paris and its roofs, gilded for an hour by the last gleams of the sunlight, and afterward silvered by the first beams of the moon. Then a feeling of extreme terror took hold of him when he saw immense clouds rolling along the sky and gathering above the Louvre, portending a storm during the night.

Among the Duc d'Anjou's many weaknesses, one was a dread of thunder.

The prince would now have given a great deal to have the minions guarding him in his chamber, though they insulted him the while.

However, he abandoned all idea of calling them in for such a purpose; their gibes and sneers would be unendurable.

He threw himself on his bed, but could not sleep; he tried to read, the characters whirled before his eyes like so many black devils; he tried to drink, the wine tasted bitter; he drew the tips of his fingers across the strings of Aurilly's lute, which hung from the wall, but the effect of the vibrations on his nerves was to make him shed tears.

Then he began swearing like a pagan and breaking everything within reach of his hand.

This was a family failing, to which every one residing in the Louvre was accustomed.

The minions half opened the door to see what was the meaning of this ear-splitting uproar; but as soon as they perceived it was only the prince amusing himself, they closed the door again, and this inflamed his fury to a higher degree than ever.

He had just broken a chair when there was a crash in the direction of the window; the sound could not be mistaken, it was the sound of broken glass, and, at the same moment, the prince felt a sharp pain in one of his hips.

His first idea was that he had been wounded by an arque-

buse-bullet, and that the shot had been fired by an emissary of the King.

"Ah! traitor! coward!" cried the prisoner, "you have had me killed in the way you threatened. Ah! I am dead!"

And he fell all in a heap on the carpet.

But, after falling, his hand came in contact with a somewhat hard object, more uneven, and larger, especially, than an arquebuse-bullet.

"Ha! a stone," said he; "was it a shot from a falconet? But, in that case, I must have heard an explosion."

And at the same time he stretched out his leg; although the pain was acute enough, evidently there was no serious injury.

He picked up the stone and examined the pane.

The stone had been hurled with such force that, instead of shattering the glass, it had rather made a hole in it.

The stone appeared to be wrapped up in something likepaper.

Then the duke's ideas took a different direction:

"What if this stone had been hurled by a friend, and not by an enemy?"

Drops of sweat stood on his forehead; hope, like fear, is often a source of anguish.

The duke approached the lamp.

Yes, he was right; a piece of paper was wrapped around the stone, and kept in its place by a silken cord knotted repeatedly.

The paper had naturally deadened the hardness of the flint; otherwise, the contusion felt by the prince would have been of a far more painful character.

To break the silk, unroll the paper, and read what was written on it, was the work of a moment.

"A letter," he murmured, looking stealthily around him.

And he read:

"Are you tired of keeping your room? Would you like the open air and freedom? Enter the little room in which the Queen of Navarre concealed your poor friend, M. de la Mole. Open the closet, and if you draw out the lowest shelf you will find a double bottom; in this double bottom there is a silk ladder. Fasten it with your own hands to the balcony. Two stout arms will hold the ladder firm at the bottom of the fosse. A horse, fleet as the wind, will carry you to a safe place.

"A friend."

"A friend!" cried the prince, "a friend! Oh! I did not know a friend was left me. Who can this friend be who thinks of me now?"

And the duke reflected for a moment, but he could not recall any friend to mind, and ran to look through the window. He saw nobody.

"What if it were a snare?" muttered the prince, in whom the first feeling awakened was always fear.

"But the first thing to find out," he added, "is whether this closet has a double bottom, and whether the double bottom contains a ladder."

The duke, then, leaving the lamp where it stood, and determined, for greater safety, to trust only to the evidence of his hands, directed his steps toward that cabinet he had so often entered once with beating heart, when he expected to find within it the Queen of Navarre, radiant in her dazzling beauty.

This time also, it must be confessed, the duke's heart beat violently.

He opened the closet, groping with his hands, examined all the shelves, and came at last to the bottom one. After pressing on it in several places without result, he pressed on one of the sides, and then the plank stood up.

As soon as he plunged his hand into the cavity it came in contact with the silk ladder.

Fleeing like a thief with his booty, the duke carried his treasure into his bedroom.

It struck ten. The duke at once thought of the visit paid him every hour. He hastened to conceal the ladder under the cushion of an armchair and sat on top of it.

The ladder had been so artistically constructed that it fitted easily into the narrow space where the duke buried it.

He was not too soon. Before five minutes, Maugiron in his dressing-gown made his appearance, with a sword under his left arm and a taper in his right hand.

All the time he was entering he kept up a conversation with his friends.

"The bear is furious," cried a voice; "just a moment ago he was smashing everything to pieces; take care he does not devour you, Maugiron."

"The insolent scoundrel!" murmured the duke.

"I believe your highness did me the honor to address me," said Maugiron, in his most impertinent manner.

The prince was very near giving expression to his rage, but, after reflecting that a quarrel would waste a good deal of time and, perhaps, prevent his escape, he curbed his fury, and wheeled round his chair, so as to turn his back on the young man.

Maugiron, following the usual course, approached the bed, examined the sheets, and saw that the window curtains were undisturbed. He perceived quickly that a pane of glass was broken, but concluded it was the work of the prince, who must have smashed it in his anger.

"Hello, Maugiron," cried Schomberg, "are you eaten already that you do not speak? Can't you give a groan, at least, that we may know what has happened and avenge you?"

The duke cracked the joints of his fingers in his impatience.

"Oh, no," answered Maugiron, "on the contrary, my bear is very gentle, and quite tame."

The duke smiled silently in the darkness.

As for Maugiron, he passed out without even saluting the prince, a politeness certainly due to so puissant a lord, and then double-locked the door.

The prince made no observation, but when the key no longer grated in the lock, he murmured:

"Gentlemen, beware! The bear is a very sharp-witted beast!"

CHAPTER LII.

VENTRE SAINT-GRIS.

When the Duc d'Anjou was alone, and knew that he would not be disturbed for at least an hour, he drew his ladder from underneath the cushion, partially unrolled it, examined every knot, and all with the utmost care.

"The ladder," said he, "is all right and is not offered me as a contrivance for getting my ribs broken."

Then he unrolled the remainder of it and counted thirty-eight rungs fifteen inches apart.

"Well and good!" he thought, "the length is sufficient; nothing to be feared in that respect."

After this, he reflected for a moment.

"Ah!" said he, "now that I think of it, what if it were those infernal minions who sent me this ladder? I would fasten it to the balcony, they would not interfere, and, just after I began my descent, they would come and cut the cords; is that the snare, I wonder?"

And he became thoughtful again.

"But no," he said, "that is not possible; they are not so silly as to imagine I should descend without first barricading the door, and, the door once barricaded, they would know I should have time to escape before they burst it in.

"It is the very thing I should do," he thought, looking round him, "the very thing I would do if I decided on fleeing.

"And, moreover, how could they imagine I had discovered this ladder in the closet of the Queen of Navarre? Who, except my sister Marguerite, could have any idea of its existence?

"But then," he continued, "who is the friend? The note is signed: 'A friend.' What friend of the Duc d'Anjou is acquainted with the secret bottoms in the closets of my apartments and my sister's?"

And having propounded and, as he believed, victoriously solved this problem, the duke read the letter a second time to see if he could recognize the handwriting. Then a thought suddenly struck him.

"Bussy!" he cried.

Yes, in very truth, was it not Bussy? Bussy, adored by so many great ladies, Bussy, who seemed such a hero to the Queen of Navarre that, as she acknowledges in her memoirs, she uttered cries of terror every time he fought a duel; Bussy the circumspect, Bussy, an adept in the science of closets. Was not Bussy the only friend among all his friends upon whom the Duc d'Anjou could really rely? Was not Bussy, in all probability, then, the sender of this note? And yet —

The prince felt more and more puzzled at the idea of his former favorite's intervention.

But still, everything combined to persuade him that Bussy was the author of the letter. The duke was not aware of all the reasons that gentleman had for disliking him, as he was ignorant of his love for Diane de Méridor. It is true he had a faint suspicion of his follower's passion. Loving Diane himself, he suspected that Bussy could hardly have seen this

beautiful woman without loving her also. But this slight suspicion was effaced by other considerations. Moreover, Bussy was so loyal-hearted that he could not remain idle at a time when his master was in fetters, and, in addition to this, he was the kind of person to be seduced by the spice of adventure in such an expedition; he had determined, then, to avenge the duke in his own way, that is to say, by restoring him to liberty. The prince could no longer have a doubt; it was Bussy who had written the letter; it was Bussy who was waiting for him.

To become, if possible, a little more sure of the fact, he approached the window.

He saw in the fog that rose from the river three indistinct oblong forms, which, he thought, must be horses, and two figures, not unlike posts and apparently fixed firmly in the sand of the beach, which must surely be two men.

Yes, two men, undoubtedly: Bussy and his trusty Le Haudouin.

"The temptation is too great to be withstood," murmured the duke, "and the snare, if snare there be, is too artistically planned to make me ashamed of myself if I be caught in it."

François next looked through the hole in the lock of the door opening on the drawing-room; his four guards were there: two were asleep, and the two others were playing at chess on Chicot's chessboard.

He extinguished the light.

Then he opened the window and leaned out over the balcony.

The gulf whose depth he tried to fathom was rendered more appalling by the darkness that covered it.

He recoiled.

But air and space have such an irresistible attraction for a prisoner that François, on returning to his room, felt as if he were stifling.

So strong was the emotion he experienced that something like a disgust for life and an indifference to death passed through his mind.

The prince was amazed, and imagined he was becoming courageous.

Then, taking advantage of this moment of excitement, he seized the silk ladder and fastened it to his balcony by the hooks placed at one end of it for the purpose. Next, he entered his room and barricaded the door as thoroughly as he was able to do, and, sure now that it would take his guards at least ten

minutes to vanquish the obstacle he had just created, that is to say, more time than he needed to reach the last rung in his ladder, he returned to the window.

He tried to make out, a second time, the outlines of the men and horses in the distance, but he was unable to distinguish any object.

"I don't know," he murmured, "but this would be safer. To escape alone is far better than to escape in company with your best-known friend, and infinitely better than to escape with an unknown friend."

At this moment the darkness was complete, and the first growlings of the storm that was approaching during the last hour began to rumble in the heavens. A big cloud with silvery fringes stretched from one side of the river to the other; it resembled an elephant at rest, its crupper supported by the palace, its proboscis, irregularly curved, passing over the Tour de Nesle and vanishing in the southern extremity of the city. A flash of lightning rent for a moment this immense cloud, and the prince thought he could perceive the persons he had vainly sought for on the beach in the fosse beneath him.

A horse neighed. There could be no doubt now. They were waiting for him.

The duke shook the ladder to test the solidity of the fastening; then he climbed over the balustrade and placed a foot on the first round.

It would be impossible to describe the terrible anguish that at this moment wrung the heart of the prisoner, placed as he was between the solitary support of a frail silken strand and the deadly menaces of his brother.

But, as he stood there, it seemed to him that the ladder instead of oscillating, as he had expected, stiffened, on the contrary, and that the second round met his other foot, without the ladder appearing to make the rotatory movement naturally to be expected in such circumstances.

Was a friend or an enemy holding the bottom of the ladder? Would open, friendly arms receive him when he reached the last round, or arms bearing hostile weapons?

A terror he could not resist held François in its clutches; his left hand still rested on the balcony, he made a movement as if he would return.

It looked as if the invisible person who awaited the prince at the foot of the wall divined everything that was passing

through his heart; for, at that very moment, there was a slight pull at the ladder, repeated softly and regularly; it was a sort of silken invitation reaching even to the feet of the duke.

"From the way they are holding the ladder," he thought, "they evidently do not want me to fall. Now or never is the time for courage."

And he continued his descent; the two supports of the rungs of the ladder were as rigid as if they were sticks. François noticed that his rescuers were careful to keep the rungs away from the wall, so as to give him a better footing.

Thereupon, François shot downward like an arrow, making hardly any use of the rungs, but gliding along with his hands, and tearing his cloak in his rapid descent.

Suddenly, instead of touching the earth, which he felt instinctively to be close to his feet, he was caught in the arms of a man, who whispered these three words in his ear:

"You are saved!"

Then he was carried to the opposite side of the fosse and hurried along a road from which masses of earth and stone sloped down on either side. At length, a man seized him by the collar and drew him up to the crest of the ditch, and, after aiding the companion of François in the same way, ran to the river. The horses were in the place where the duke had first seen them.

He knew there was no drawing back now; he was at the mercy of his saviors, so he leaped on one of the horses; his companions mounted the two others.

The same voice that had already whispered in his ear said with the same brevity:

"Spur."

And the three men set off at a gallop.

"So far, all goes well," thought the prince, "it is to be hoped the end will not belie the promise of the beginning."

"Thanks, my brave Bussy," said he in a low murmur to his comrade on the right, whose face was muffled up in a big brown cloak.

"Spur," was the only answer given from behind the cloak, and as the speaker himself gave the example, the three horses passed on like the wind.

In this fashion they arrived at the great fosse of the Bastile, which they crossed on a bridge improvised the night before by the Leaguers, who were unwilling to have their communica-

tions with their friends interrupted, and had adopted this plan to ensure the concentration of their members where it was needed.

The three riders pushed on toward Charenton. The prince's horse seemed to have wings.

Suddenly the man on his right leaped the fosse and dashed into the forest of Vincennes, saying, with his usual curtness, this one word to the prince:

"Come."

The man on the left imitated the man on the right, but without speaking. In fact, during the whole journey, a word had never left his lips.

The prince did not need to draw the reins tight or press the flanks of his steed with his knees; the noble animal leaped the fosse with the same ardor exhibited by the two other horses. The neigh he gave when clearing the ditch was answered by several neighs from the depths of the forest.

The prince tried to stop his horse, for he feared he was being led into an ambuscade.

But it was too late; the animal was too excited to feel the bit; however, on seeing the other horses slacken their paces, the charger of François also came to a trot, and the duke soon found himself in a sort of clearing where eight or ten men on horseback, drawn up in military array, were revealed to his eyes by the moonlight, which was reflected on their cuirasses, turning them to silver.

"Monsieur," said the prince, "pray, what does this mean?"

"*Ventre saint-gris!*" answered the man whom he had questioned, "it means we are safe."

"What! you, Henri!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, in amazement, "you are my liberator?"

"Egad," said the Béarnais, "I do not see why that should surprise you. Are we not allies?"

Then, looking round for his other companion:

"Agrippa," said he, "where the devil are you?"

"Here I am," said D'Aubigné, who had kept grimly silent until now. "You ought to be proud of yourself; the way you treat your horses! — especially as you have so many of them!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, stop your growling; if I can only get two fresh horses, that had a rest, and are capable of doing their dozen leagues without stopping, it's all I need."

"But where are you taking me, cousin?" asked François, uneasily.

"Wherever you wish," answered Henri; "but we must go quickly, for D'Aubigné is right: the King of France has better furnished stables than I have, and he is rich enough to afford killing a score of horses, if he take it into his head to catch up with us."

"So, then, I am really free to go where I like?" inquired François.

"Of course; I am simply at your orders," replied Henri.

"Well, then, I wish to go to Angers."

"You wish to go to Angers? To Angers let us go, then; you are naturally at home in that quarter."

"And where are you going, cousin?"

"Oh, as soon as we come in sight of Angers I leave you and spur for Navarre, where my good Margot is waiting for me; she must be terribly bored at having to live so long without me!"

"But did any one know you were in Paris?" said François.

"I suppose not. I only came to sell three diamonds belonging to my wife."

"Ah, indeed!"

"And I wanted to find out, too, if the League was really going to ruin me."

"You see it amounts to nothing."

"Yes, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me! how?"

"Why, if, instead of refusing to be chief of the League, when you learned it was directed against me, you had accepted the command and made common cause with my enemies, I should have been ruined. So, when I found out the King had imprisoned you for your refusal, I swore to rescue you, and I have done so."

"He is always so simple," said François to himself, "that it is really a conscientious duty to deceive him."

"Go, cousin, go to Anjou," said the Béarnais, with a smile. "Aha, M. de Guise, you think you rule the roost! But I am sending you a friend that will, perhaps, trip you up occasionally; look out!"

And as soon as the fresh horses were brought which Henri had ordered, both of them leaped into the saddles and set off at a gallop, accompanied by Agrippa d'Aubigné, who never stopped growling.

CHAPTER LIII

THE FRIENDS.

While Paris was flaming and boiling like the interior of a furnace, Madame de Monsoreau, escorted by her father and two of those servants who at that period were temporarily recruited for an expedition like the present one, was making her way to Méridor by stages of ten leagues a day.

She was also beginning to enjoy that freedom which is so precious to those who have suffered.

The azure sky of the country, which had nothing in keeping with the eternally threatening sky that hung above the black towers of the Bastile like a pall, the trees already green, the beautiful lanes, winding like long, undulating ribbons through the heart of the forest, appeared to her as fresh and young, as novel and delectable as if she had really just escaped from the watery grave in which her father had believed her buried.

As for the old baron, he looked twenty years younger.

From the erectness of his bearing in the saddle, and the fire with which he urged on old Jarnac, a spectator might be excused if he took the noble lord for some graybeard husband on his wedding-tour, watching amorously over his youthful bride.

We will not attempt to describe this long journey.

Sunrise and sunset embraced its most important incidents.

When the moon illuminated with silvery tints the windows of her chamber in some hostelry on the road, Diane usually leaped out of bed, awoke the baron, aroused her servants from their heavy slumbers, and the whole party set out again, guided on their way by the lovely moonlight, all to gain a few leagues during this long journey, which the young woman thought would never have an end.

At other times, just in the heat of a gallop, she would allow Jarnac, quite proud on such occasions of being in the lead, to shoot past her, then the rest of her escort to do the same, and, halting on some rising ground, would turn round and peer into the depths of the valley to discover whether she was followed. When the valley was evidently deserted, and Diane could see nothing but the flocks and herds scattered along the pastures, or the solemn spire of some village church towering aloft at

the end of a highway, she returned more impatient than ever.

Whereupon, her father, glancing at her from the corner of his eye, would say:

"Do not be afraid, Diane."

"Afraid of what, father?"

"Are you not looking to see if M. de Monsoreau is following?"

"Ah — yes — you are right; that is why I was looking," answered the young woman, with another glance behind her.

And so, after many a hope, and fear, and disappointment, Diane reached the Castle of Méridor at the end of a week, and was received on the drawbridge by Madame de Saint-Luc and her husband, who had acted as lord and lady of the manor during the baron's absence.

Then began for these four people one of those existences of which every one has dreamed who has read Virgil, Longus, and Theocritus.

The baron and Saint-Luc hunted from morning to night, followed closely by their whippers-in.

Then might be seen a very avalanche of dogs rolling down the hillsides at the tail of a fox or hare, and when this furious cavalcade thundered past them into the woods, Diane and Jeanne, seated side by side on some mossy mound in the shade of a thicket, would start for a moment, but soon renew their tender and mysterious conversation.

"Tell me," said Jeanne, "tell me all that happened to you in your tomb, for you were, indeed, dead for us. Look! the hawthorn is in flower, and shedding on us its little snowflakes, and the guelder-roses waft toward us their intoxicating perfume. The soft sunlight laughs amid the huge oaken branches. Not a breath in the air, not a living being in the park, for the roebucks have disappeared, dismayed by the trembling of the earth under the hoof-beat of the horses, and the foxes have vanished into their holes. Tell me everything, my little sister."

"Did I not tell you something already?"

"You told me nothing. Are you happy, then? Ah! those beautiful eyes encircled by bluish shadows, the pearly paleness of your cheeks, the drooping eyelid, the mouth that tries to smile and never completely succeeds — Diane, Diane, you must, indeed, have much to tell me."

"Nothing, I assure you."

"Then, you are happy — with M. de Monsereau?"

Diane started.

"You see you would deceive me," said Jeanne, reproachfully but tenderly.

"With M. de Monsoreau!" repeated Diane; "why do you utter that name? Why do you raise up that spectre in the midst of these woods, in the midst of these flowers, in the midst of our happiness" —

"Well, I know now why your eyes are encircled with blue, and why they are so often raised to heaven; but I know not yet why your lips try to smile."

Diane sadly shook her head.

"You told me, I think," continued Jeanne, flinging her white, round arm about Diane's neck, "that M. de Bussy has taken great interest in you."

Diane blushed so deeply that her little delicate ears seemed inflamed.

"A charming cavalier is M. de Bussy," said Jeanne. And she sang:

"'As a picker of quarrels
D'Amboise has won laurels.'"

Diane rested her head on her friend's bosom, and, in a voice sweeter than the warbling of the birds amid the foliage, she murmured:

"'But give Bussy his due —
He is tender and'" —

"True!" exclaimed Jeanne, joyously, kissing her friend's eyes.

"Oh, this is all folly," said Diane, abruptly. "M. de Bussy d'Amboise no longer thinks of Diane de Méridor."

"Possibly," answered Jeanne; "but I am rather inclined to believe that Diane de Monsoreau still thinks of him."

"You must not say so."

"Why? Because it vexes you?"

Diane did not reply. Then, after a pause, she murmured:

"I tell you he thinks no more of me — and he does well. Oh! I have been such a coward!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Now, Diane, you are going to cry, and to blame yourself — You a coward! you, my heroine! you were forced to act as you did."

"I believed so. I saw dangers, saw a perilous gulf beneath my feet. But now, Jeanne, all these dangers seem to me imaginary; a child might cross that gulf with a single stride. I was a coward, I tell you. Oh! if I had only had time to reflect!"

"What you tell me is to me an enigma."

"Yet, no, it was not so," said Diane, rising in great agitation. "No, it was not my fault, Jeanne; *he* it was who drew back. I remember how terrible my position appeared; I hesitated, I wavered. My father offered me his support and I was afraid. *He, he* offered me his protection, but not in a way to encourage me to accept it. The Duc d'Anjou was against him; the Duc d'Anjou was in league with M. de Monsoreau, you will tell me. Well, what if they were leagued together? Ah! if I were really determined on achieving an object, if I loved any one with my whole heart, not all the princes and masters in Christendom could hold me back; for, Jeanne, once I truly loved" —

And Diane, overcome by her emotion, leaned back against an oak, as if the soul had so tortured the body that the latter could no longer stand upright.

"Come, come, my darling, collect yourself, try to be calm" —

"I tell you *we* have been *cowards!*"

"*We* — Diane, to whom do you allude? That *we* is full of significance."

"I am speaking of my father and myself; I hope you did not understand me to speak of anybody else, did you? My father is a nobleman of rank and could have spoken to the King; and I am proud and do not fear a man when I hate him — But — the secret of my cowardice was this: I saw *he* did not love me."

"You are false to your own heart!" cried Jeanne. "If you believed that, you would, from what I know of you, go to the man himself and reproach him with his baseness. But you do not believe it; you know that the contrary is the fact, hypocrite!" she added, with a tender caress.

"Oh, it is natural for you to believe in love," answered Diane, again sitting down beside Jeanne; "you whom Saint-Luc married in spite of a king! you whom he bore away from the very centre of Paris! you who pay him by your caresses for proscription and exile!"

"And he ought to think that he is richly paid, too," said the roguish young woman.

"But I—reflect a little and be not so selfish—I whom this fiery young man pretended to love, I who attracted the admiration of the indomitable Bussy, of that man who laughs at obstacles—I espoused him as it were publicly, I offered myself to him before the eyes of the entire court, and he did not even look at me; I placed myself under his protection in the cloister of Saint Mary of Egypt; we were alone, except for the presence of Gertrude and Le Haudouin, his two accomplices—I a more willing accomplice than either— Oh, when I think of it! His horse stood at the door; he could have borne me off from the very church in a fold of his cloak! For, at that moment, look you, I felt that he was disconsolate and heartbroken on account of me; I saw that his eyes were dull, his lips bloodless and parched with fever. If my death could have restored the lustre of his eyes, the ruddiness of his lips, and he had asked for my life, I would have gladly surrendered it at that moment. Well! I started to leave the church, and he did not attempt to hold me back by a corner of my veil! Wait, wait awhile— Ah! you do not know what I am suffering. He knew that I was departing from Paris, he knew I was returning to Méridor, he knew—hold! I blush to say it—he knew that M. de Monsoreau is not my husband, except in name, he knew I was travelling alone, and every few minutes on the road I turned and turned, dear Jeanne, thinking I heard his horse's gallop behind us. Nothing! it was the echo of the hoofs of our own horses that came to my ear. I tell you he never thinks of me; I am not worth a journey to Anjou, as long as there are so many fair and gracious women at the court of the King of France, whose smiles have a greater charm for him than the fond devotion of a provincial buried in the woods of Méridor. Do you understand now? Are you convinced? Am I not right? Am I not forgotten and despised, my poor Jeanne?"

She had scarcely finished when the foliage of the oak rustled; a quantity of moss and broken mortar rolled down from the old wall, and a man, bounding through the middle of the ivy and wild mulberries, appeared before Diane. He flung himself on his knees, and the young woman uttered a cry of terror.

Jeanne stole away the moment she saw and recognized this man.

"You know now you are not forgotten," murmured Bussy,

kissing, as he knelt, the hem of Diane's robe, which he held respectfully in his trembling hand.

She, too, recognized the voice, the smile of the count, and, stunned, overpowered, maddened by this unlooked-for happiness, she opened her arms, and fell, swooning and unconscious, on the breast of the man she had just accused of indifference.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE LOVERS.

Swoons occasioned by joy are neither very long nor very dangerous. There have been cases where such swoons resulted in death, but they are exceedingly rare.

Diane, therefore, soon opened her eyes and found herself lying in Bussy's arms, for Bussy had determined that the first look of his mistress should not be for Madame de Saint-Luc.

"Oh!" she murmured, when she awoke, "oh! to surprise us in this manner, count, is frightful!"

Bussy had expected to be greeted by words of a different kind.

And who knows — men are so unreasonable — who knows, we repeat, if he did not expect something more than words, having so large an experience of women who returned to life after fainting-fits and trances?

Not only did Diane disappoint any such expectation, if he entertained it, but she gently freed herself from the arms that held her captive, and returned to her friend. That friend had at first proved her discretion by going for a walk under the adjoining trees; then, interested, as every woman would be, in the charming spectacle of a reconciliation of lovers, she came back at a leisurely pace, not with the intention of taking part in the conversation, but determined not to lose a word of it, either.

"What, madame, is this the way you receive me?" asked Bussy.

"No," said Diane, "for, in good truth, M. de Bussy, I am conscious of the tenderness and affection that led you here — But" —

"Oh, for mercy's sake, no 'buts,'" sighed Bussy, falling again on his knees before Diane.

"No, no, not on your knees, pray, M. de Bussy."

"Oh!" said the count, clasping his hands, "allow me to stay here and pray to you as I am doing. I have so longed for this moment."

"Yes, but in order to come here you have climbed over the wall, a proceeding unbecoming in a man of your rank, and decidedly imprudent in a man who has some concern for my honor."

"Why?"

"What if you have been seen?"

"Who could see me?"

"Our hunters, who rode through the thicket behind the wall scarcely a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh, do not be uneasy, madame, I am too careful to allow myself to be discovered; I am too well disguised."

"Disguised!" cried Jeanne, "how romantic! Tell us about it, M. de Bussy."

"Let me say, in the first place, that, if I did not overtake you, it was not my fault: I took one road, you another; you went by Rambouillet, I by Chartres. Besides, just listen and judge whether your poor Bussy is in love. I did not dare to join you, although I have very little doubt that I could: I was pretty well aware that Jarnac was not in love and that the worthy animal would not be in any great hurry to return to Méridor; your father, too, must have been but little inclined to push forward, for he had you beside him. But I did not care to meet you in the company of your father or in the presence of your servants, for I am more anxious than you believe to do nothing that might compromise you; so I made the journey stage by stage, too excited to eat or drink; in fact, the knob of my riding-switch was my only food during the time; I gnawed it incessantly in my impatience."

"Poor boy!" said Jeanne; "no wonder he has grown so thin."

"At length you reached Angers," continued Bussy; "I had hired lodgings in a suburb of the city, and, hidden behind a window-blind, I saw you pass."

"But," asked Diane, "you are surely not staying at Angers under your own name?"

"For whom do you take me?" answered Bussy, with a smile; "no, I am a travelling merchant; admire my cinnamon-colored costume; it disguises me, I think, perfectly, and

is a color very fashionable among drapers and goldsmiths, and then again, my restless, bustling manners would square admirably with an apothecary searching for simples. In short, no one has taken the slightest notice of me."

"Bussy, the handsome Bussy, two successive days in a provincial city and never noticed!" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Luc. "It will never be believed at court."

"Continue, count," said Diane, blushing, "tell us how you came here from the city."

"I have two fine thoroughbreds; I mount one of them and ride slowly from the city, stopping occasionally to gape at the placards and signs. But, as soon as I am far enough from prying eyes, I set my horse to a gallop, and in twenty minutes I clear the ten and a half miles between here and the city. Once in the wood of Méridor, I set about finding my way and reach the park wall. But it is long, oh, very long, indeed, and the park, too, is very large. Yesterday I spent more than four hours in taking the bearings of this wall, climbing here and there in hopes to catch a glimpse of you. I had grown almost desperate, when I perceived you last evening returning to the house; the baron's two big dogs were leaping after you, and Madame de Saint-Luc was holding up a partridge which they tried to jump at; then you vanished.

"With a jump and a leap, I was myself on the spot where you were sitting just now; I noticed the trampled appearance of the grass and moss, and concluded that this charming place was your preferred retreat during the heat of the sun; to make sure of not mistaking my way to this point again, I did as hunters are in the habit of doing, I broke off brambles here and there on my return, all the while sighing; a thing that hurts me frightfully" —

"Because you are not accustomed to it," said Jeanne, smiling.

"You may be right, madame, but allow me to repeat the phrase: all the while sighing, a thing that hurts me frightfully, I make my way back to the city; I was awfully tired, and, to add to my misery, I had torn my cinnamon doublet while climbing the trees; still, despite the rents in my raiment, despite the weight on my breast, there was joy in my heart: I had seen you."

"Why, your tale is admirable, and admirably told," said Jeanne; "and what terrible obstacles you have surmounted!

No wonder they call you a hero! Still, if I, who would not climb a tree for the world, had happened to be in your place, I should have taken a little care of my doublet and spared my beautiful white hands. Look in what a lamentable condition yours are, all scratched by thorns."

"Yes, but in that case I should not have seen the person I came to see."

"You are quite mistaken; I should have seen Diane de Méridor, and Madame de Saint-Luc, too, if I cared to, without taking half the trouble you did."

"What would you have done, then?" inquired Bussy, eagerly.

"I should have gone straight to the bridge of the castle of Méridor, and then crossed it. M. le Baron would have taken me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have invited me to a seat by her side at table, M. de Saint-Luc would have been delighted to see me, and I and Madame de Saint-Luc should have made anagrams together. Why, it would have been the simplest thing in the world; but the simplest thing in the world is just the thing lovers never think of."

Bussy shook his head with a smile and a glance addressed to Diane.

"Oh, no!" he said, "no; that might have been all very well for any one else to do, but not for me."

Diane blushed like a child, and the same smile and glance were reflected in her eyes and on her lips.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Jeanne; "so now, it seems, I am quite ignorant of the manners of polite society!"

"No!" said Bussy, with another shake of the head. "No! I could not go to the castle. Madame is married; it is M. le Baron's duty to watch over his daughter with the strictest vigilance, a duty he owes his daughter's husband."

"Oh, thank you, M. de Bussy!" said Jeanne; "you are kind enough to give me another lesson in the art of good breeding; thanks again, M. de Bussy, I deserved it at your hands; this will teach me to meddle with the affairs of mad people in future."

"Mad people?" repeated Diane.

"Mad people or lovers," answered Madame de Saint-Luc, "and consequently" —

She kissed Diane on the forehead, made a sweeping courtesy to Bussy, and fled.

Diane tried to detain her with a hand which Bussy seized; being interfered with by her lover in this imperious fashion, she had to let Jeanne go.

Bussy and Diane were now alone.

Diane turned her eyes reproachfully on Madame de Saint-Luc, who was picking flowers as she went along, and then sat down blushing

Bussy flung himself at her feet.

"Have I not acted rightly, madame," said he; "and do you not approve of what I have done?"

"I will not feign," answered Diane; "and besides, you know what is in my heart. Yes, I approve; but my indulgence must not go further. When I wished for you, called for you, as I did just now, I was beside myself — and I was guilty."

"Great heavens! what are you saying now, Diane?"

"Alas, count, I am saying the truth! I have the right to render M. de Monsoreau, who has driven me to this extremity, unhappy, but this right belongs to me only as long as I decline to make another happy. I may refuse him my society, my smiles, my love; but if I granted those favors to another, I should be robbing one who, after all, is my master."

Bussy listened impatiently to this ethical disquisition, softened, it is true, by the gracious gentleness of Diane.

"It is my turn to speak now, is it not?" said he.

"Speak," answered Diane.

"Frankly?"

"Speak!"

"Well, madame, of all you have just said you have not found a single word in your heart."

"Why?"

"Listen to me patiently, madame; you will acknowledge that I have listened patiently to you. You have, literally, overwhelmed me with sophisms."

Diane started.

"The commonplaces of morality," continued Bussy, "have not the slightest bearing on the present situation. In exchange for your sophisms, madame, I will give you truths. A man, you say, is your master, but did you choose this master? No; an evil fate imposed him on you, and you submitted. You mean to endure for a whole lifetime the consequences of that odious infliction? Then it is my duty to save you from them."

Diane opened her lips to speak. Bussy stopped her with a gesture.

"Oh, I know what you would answer," said the young man. "You would answer that, should I challenge M. de Monsoreau, and kill him, you would never see me again — so be it, then! I shall die of the grief of not seeing you, but you will live free, will live happy, will have it in your power to bestow happiness on some worthy man, who, in his joy, will now and then bless my name, and say: 'Thanks, Bussy, thanks, for rescuing us from that abominable Monsoreau!' and you yourself, Diane, who would not dare to thank me while living, would thank me when I am dead."

The young woman seized the count's hand and pressed it tenderly.

"You threaten me, Bussy," said she, "even before you have sued me for a single favor."

"Threaten you? Ah! God is listening to me and he knows what my intentions are; I love you so ardently, Diane, that I shall not act like other men. I know you love me. Great God! why should you deny it and class yourself with those vulgar souls whose deeds belie their words! I know you love me, for you have confessed it. Now, a love like mine is like the genial sunlight and quickens every heart it touches; and so, I will not sue, I will not waste away in despair. No, I will fall down at your knees and kiss them, and, with my right hand on my heart, that heart that has never lied, either from interest or fear, I will say to you: 'Diane, I love you, and that love is the love of my entire life! I swear in the face of Heaven that I am ready to die for you, and die adoring you.' If you still answer: 'Go, do not rob another of his happiness,' I will rise without a sigh, without a sign, from this spot where I am so happy, and after a last farewell, I will say to myself: 'This woman does not love me; this woman will never love me.' Then I will depart and never more shall you set eyes on me again. But, as my devotion is even greater than my love, as my desire to see you happy will survive the certainty that I cannot be happy myself, as I shall not have deprived another of his happiness, I shall have the right of depriving him of his life while, at the same time, sacrificing my own. This is what I shall do, madame, and I shall do it that you may not be a slave forever and may no longer point

to your present situation as an excuse for making unhappy the generous hearts that love you."

Bussy had been deeply moved while uttering these words. Diane read in his faithful and brilliant eyes the strength of his resolve; she knew that he would do what he said he would do, that his words would infallibly have their fulfilment in his deeds; and, as the snows of April melt away under the rays of the sun, her resistance melted away under the fire of his eyes.

"Well," said she, "I thank you for the violence with which you assail me. It is another proof of your delicacy to save me in this way from the remorse of having yielded to you. And now, will you love me, as you have said, even till death? Shall I not, perhaps, be the plaything of your fancy for a time and then left to regret that I did not listen to the odious love of M. de Monsoreau? But no, I have no conditions to make. I am vanquished; I surrender. I am yours, Bussy, at least in love. Remain, then, dearest, and since now my life is yours, watch over yourself as well as over me."

While speaking, Diane placed one of her delicate white hands on Bussy's shoulder, and tendered to him the other, which he held lovingly pressed to his lips; Diane trembled under that kiss.

Then they heard the light footsteps of Jeanne, accompanied by a little warning cough.

She had in one hand a bunch of fresh flowers and in the other the first butterfly that had, perhaps, ventured out of its silken shell, an Atalanta with red and black wings.

The clasped hands instinctively parted.

Jeanne noticed the movement.

"Forgive me, my good friends," said she, "for disturbing you, but if you do not return to the house we'll have a servant coming after us. M. le Comte, you will have the goodness to betake yourself to whatever spot holds that thoroughbred horse of yours which makes twelve miles in half an hour, and you will also have the kindness to permit me and Diane to make — as slowly as possible, for I imagine we'll have a good deal to talk about — the fifteen hundred steps between us and the castle. Ah, M. de Bussy, you see now what you are losing by your obstinacy — a dinner at the castle, not to be despised, I assure you, especially by a man who amuses himself by climbing over walls after a long ride, and a lot of merry

stories told by you to me and by me to you, not to reckon a certain number of glances exchanged, the sort of glances that set the heart beating awfully. Come, Diane, let us return," and Jeanne took her friend's arm and made a slight effort to draw her along.

Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diane, half turned toward him, held out her hand.

He approached them.

"Well," he asked, "is that all you have to say to me?"

"On to-morrow," she said; "was not that understood?"

"On to-morrow only?"

"On to-morrow and forever!"

Bussy could not keep from uttering a cry of joy; he pressed his lips on Diane's hand; then, with a last adieu to the two women, he started away, or, rather, fled.

He felt that only by a strong effort of his will could he bring himself to leave the woman with whom he had never hoped to be united.

Diane followed him with her eyes until he had plunged into the depths of the thicket; even then she forced her friend to stop as long as she could hear the echo of his footsteps in the brushwood.

"And now," said Jeanne, when Bussy had quite disappeared, "suppose we talk a little, Diane."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the young woman, starting as if her friend's voice awoke her from a dream, "I am listening to you."

"Very good. I want to tell you I intend hunting to-morrow with Saint-Luc and your father."

"Oh, surely you would not leave me all by myself in the castle?"

"Listen, my dear friend," answered Jeanne. "I too have my own principles of morality, and there are certain things which I cannot consent to do."

"Oh, Jeanne!" cried Madame de Monsoreau, turning pale; "can you use such hard words to me — to me, your friend?"

"Friendship has nothing to do with the matter," said Madame de Saint-Luc, as tranquilly as before; "this cannot continue."

"I thought you loved me, Jeanne, and now you wound me to the quick," said the young woman, with tears in her eyes. "This cannot continue, you say; what is it, then, you would not have continue?"

"I cannot continue," murmured Jeanne in her ears, "hindering you and him, poor lovers as you are, from loving each other at your ease."

Diane clasped the laughing young woman in her arms, and covered her roguish face with kisses.

While she was holding her in a close embrace, the horns of the hunters were heard sounding a deafening flourish.

"We must hurry on, they are calling us," said Jeanne. "Poor Saint-Luc is growing impatient. You must not, by your delays, treat him worse than I intend treating the amorous individual in the cinnamon doublet."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW BUSSY MIGHT HAVE HAD THREE HUNDRED PISTOLES FOR HIS HORSE, AND PARTED WITH HIM FOR NOTHING.

Bussy left Angers long before the earliest-rising citizen had partaken of his morning repast.

He did something more than gallop along the road — he flew.

Diane was standing on one of the terraces of the castle, from which there was a good view of the white pathway that wound its sinuous course through the green meadows.

She beheld a black point shooting toward her like a meteor, and leaving more and more of yonder tortuous ribbon behind it.

She at once ran down the slope, so that Bussy might not have to wait, and that she might have the merit of not having kept him waiting.

The sun had but as yet faintly gleamed over the tops of the giant oaks, the grass was still wet with pearly dewdrops, far away on the mountain echoed the horn of Saint-Luc, sounded at the instigation of Jeanne to remind her friend of the service she was rendering her in leaving her alone.

The joy in Diane's heart was so great and overpowering, she was so intoxicated by her youth, her beauty, and her love, that she felt sometimes during her rapid course as if her soul were soaring aloft with her body and bearing it on wings to the throne of God.

But the distance between the castle and the thicket was long, the young woman's little feet grew weary of treading the

thick grass, and she lost breath several times on the way; so she only reached the rendezvous just at the moment when Bussy appeared on the crest of the wall and leaped to the bottom.

He saw her running; she uttered a little joyous shout; he came to her with open arms; she hurried to him, pressing both her hands on her heart; their morning greeting was a long and ardent embrace.

What had they to say? — they loved each other. What had they to think of? — they saw each other. What had they to wish for? — they were seated side by side, holding each other's hand.

The day passed as if it were an hour.

Bussy, as soon as Diane awoke from that entrancing languor which is the sleep of a soul overstrained by happiness, pressed the drooping woman to his breast and said:

"Diane, it seems to me that only to-day has my life begun, that only to-day have I a clear vision of the path that leads to eternity; you are the light that has revealed to me this happiness; I knew nothing before of this world nor of the condition of men in this world; I can then repeat to you what I said yesterday: with you have I begun to live, with you shall my life end."

"And I," she answered, "I who once would have flung myself without regret into the arms of death, I tremble to-day at the thought of not living long enough to exhaust all the treasures promised me by your love. But why not come to the castle, Louis? My father would be happy to see you; Saint-Luc is your friend, and he is discreet. To have you with me for another hour — think what it must mean to me!"

"Alas, Diane, if I go to the castle for an hour I shall be always there, and all the province will know of my presence; should the rumor of it reach that ogre, your husband, he would run hither. You have forbidden me to deliver you."

"What would be the use?" said she, in that tone which is never found but in the voice of the woman we love.

"Well, well, then, for our safety, — that is to say, for the safety of our happiness, — we must hide our secret from everybody, except Madame de Saint-Luc, who knows it already, — and Saint-Luc, who will have to know it also."

"Oh, why" —

"Darling, I tell you this because I would hide nothing from

you. I wrote a line to Saint-Luc this morning, requesting an interview at Angers. He will come; he will pledge his honor as a gentleman that never a word of this adventure shall escape his lips. What renders this the more important, my love, is the fact that people must be searching for me now in all quarters. Matters looked very grave when we were leaving Paris."

"You are right — and then, my father is so scrupulous that, though he loves me, he would be quite capable of denouncing me to M. de Monsoreau."

"We must, therefore, be very cautious. Afterward, if God deliver us to our enemies, we can, at least, say we could not have acted otherwise than we have done."

"God is good, Louis; do not doubt of his goodness now."

"I do not doubt of God; but I am afraid of some demon, jealous of our happiness."

"It is time to part, my Louis, and do not gallop so wildly; your horse frightens me."

"Have no fear, he knows the road already, and I have never ridden a gentler and safer steed. While returning to the city, I can indulge freely in the sweet thoughts that fill my mind, for he carries me without imposing on me the necessity of ever touching the reins."

The two lovers exchanged many observations of this nature, interrupted by as many kisses.

At length the music of the hunting-horn grew louder and clearer; the air it played was the one agreed on as a signal between Jeanne and her friend; and Bussy felt it was time to leave.

As he approached Angers, musing on the incidents of this enchanting day and rejoicing in his present freedom from the golden fetter in which his very honors, the management of his large fortune, and the favor of a prince of the blood had held him until now, he noticed that the hour for closing the city gates was nigh. His horse, which had spent the day in browsing on the grass and foliage, had done the same on the road, and night came on without Bussy noticing its coming.

He was on the point of clapping spurs to his steed to make up for lost time, when he heard the galloping of horses behind him.

A lover who wishes to remain concealed sees danger in every direction.

Successful lovers have this peculiarity in common with robbers.

Bussy was uncertain whether he should set his horse to a gallop and try to keep in the lead, or draw up and let the riders pass; but they rode so rapidly that they were behind him in a moment.

There were only two of them.

Bussy, considering that a man like himself, who had often encountered four men successfully, might avoid a conflict with two and not be reproached with cowardice, turned aside; then he noticed that one of the travellers was repeatedly plunging the rowels deep in his horse's flanks, while his companion lashed the poor animal violently.

"Well, yonder is the city," said this companion, speaking with a pronounced Gascon accent; "ply your whip and spurs freely and you may be inside of it soon."

"But the beast is completely out of breath; he shivers and totters; I cannot get him to move," answered the man in front of him. "I would gladly give a hundred horses to be inside my city."

"Some Angevine out late," thought Bussy. "But how stupid fear renders a man! I was afraid I recognized the voice. Ah! the good man's horse is staggering"—

At this moment the two horsemen were alongside Bussy on the road.

"Take care, monsieur," he cried; "get off, get off quick, your horse is going to fall."

Before the words were out of Bussy's mouth the horse fell heavily on his side and stirred a leg convulsively, as if he were ploughing the ground; then suddenly his laborious breathing ceased, his eyes grew dim, he frothed at the mouth and expired.

"Monsieur," said the dismounted cavalier to Bussy, "three hundred pistoles for your horse."

"Good heaven!" cried Bussy, approaching.

"Do you hear me, monsieur? I am in a hurry"—

"Why, my prince, you can have him for nothing," said Bussy, trembling with unutterable emotion; for in the traveller he recognized the Duc d'Anjou.

At the same instant was heard the click of a pistol cocked by the prince's companion.

"Stop!" cried the duke to his truculent defender. "Stop, M. d'Aubigné! Devil take me if it is n't Bussy"—

"Yes, my prince, it is I. But why the devil are you killing horses at such an hour and on such a road?"

"Ah, it is M. de Bussy," said D'Aubigné; "then, monseigneur, you no longer need me. Permit me to return to him who sent me, as the Holy Scripture says."

"Not without receiving my most sincere thanks and the promise of a lasting friendship," said the prince.

"I accept both, monseigneur, and will remind you of them some day."

"M. d'Aubigné — and your highness! — am I standing on my head or on my heels?"

"You were not aware, then, of how things stand at present?" inquired the prince, with an air of distrust and annoyance that did not escape his gentleman's notice. "You did not come here to wait for me, then?"

"Hang it!" thought Bussy, reflecting how equivocal his appearance in Anjou must seem to one so suspicious as François, "I must be cautious! I did better than wait for you," he said aloud, "and, since you wish to enter the city before the closing of the gates, — to horse, monseigneur!"

He offered his steed to the prince, who was busy removing some important papers from between the saddle and saddle-cloth of the dead animal.

"Adieu, then, monseigneur," said D'Aubigné, wheeling round. "M. de Bussy, your servant."

And he galloped off.

Bussy jumped up behind his master and directed the course of the horse to the city, all the time wondering if this black-apparelled prince were not the evil demon which hell, jealous of his happiness, had sent to trouble it.

They entered Angers just as the closing of the gates was being proclaimed by sound of trumpet.

"Where are we to go now, monseigneur?" asked Bussy.

"To the castle. My banner must be hoisted on the walls, my presence made known, and the nobility of the province convoked."

"Nothing more easy," answered Bussy, resolved to acquiesce in everything in order to gain time, and, besides, he was in too dazed a condition to be other than a passive instrument for the moment.

"Stop, gentlemen!" he shouted to the trumpeters, who were returning home after doing their office.

They turned round, but were not at all impressed when they perceived the condition of Bussy and his companion, who were covered with dust and perspiration, and whose dress by no means indicated their rank.

"Ho, there! stop!" cried Bussy, marching up to them — "is it possible the master is not recognized in his own house? — Bring hither the city councillor on duty."

The haughty tone in which Bussy spoke had its effect on the heralds; one of them approached.

"Christ in heaven!" he exclaimed, recoiling in terror, after he had taken a good look at the duke's face — "if it is n't our lord and master!"

The deformity of the prince's nose — split in two, as Chicot's song said — rendered him easily recognizable everywhere.

"Monseigneur le Duc!" he added, seizing the arm of the other herald, who was equally taken aback.

"You know as much as I do myself now," said Bussy, "so don't spare your breath, and let your trumpet sing out loud enough to wake the dead; see to it that the whole city learn in a quarter of an hour of his highness' arrival.

"And now, monseigneur," added the count, turning to the Duc d'Anjou, "the next best thing for us to do is to ride slowly to the castle. I have no doubt we shall find everything ready for your reception when we get there."

The result proved the truth of Bussy's words. At the first cry of the heralds, groups were formed here and there; at the second, old women and children were running through the lanes and streets, screaming:

"Monseigneur is in the city! Welcome to monseigneur! Noel to monseigneur!"

The city councillors, governor, and principal gentlemen hurried to the castle, followed by a crowd that grew denser every moment.

As Bussy had foreseen, the authorities of the city, anxious to receive the prince with due honor, were in the castle before him.

On his way to his residence along the quay, the prince had the greatest difficulty in forcing a passage through the assembled multitude; fortunately, Bussy had found one of the heralds, who, by using his trumpet freely on the heads of the too loyal citizens, forced them to open a path for their master. When the latter reached the steps of the Town Hall he halted and addressed the people.

"Gentlemen and right trusty and leal friends," said he, "I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. In Paris the most terrible perils threatened my life; I had even lost my liberty; I succeeded in escaping, thanks to my loyal friends."

Bussy bit his lips; he knew the meaning of the ironical glance François darted at him.

"But now that I am in your city, I feel that my life and my tranquillity are no longer exposed to any danger."

The populace, who expected the largess usually distributed by the prince on such occasions, had shouted vigorously: "Noel! Noel!"

When François entered his palace his first words were: "Let us have supper; I have eaten nothing since morning."

The prince was in a moment surrounded by all the members of the household which, as Duc d'Anjou, he kept up in Angers; only the principal servants were acquainted with their master.

It was next the turn of the gentlemen and ladies of the city.

The reception lasted until midnight.

The city was illuminated, muskets were fired off in the streets and on the squares, the bells of the cathedral were rung, and some whiffs of one of those noisy and enthusiastic celebrations for which the good Angevines have been at all times famous were borne by the wind even to Méridor.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DUC D'ANJOU'S DIPLOMACY.

When the echo of the musketry in the streets had grown fainter, when the cathedral bells had slackened their vibrations, when the antechambers were cleared of their visitors, when, in short, Bussy and the Duc d'Anjou were alone:

"Let us talk," said the latter.

In fact, François, who was very clear-sighted, had observed that at present Bussy was far more deferential toward him than he was in the habit of being; knowing the count as well as he did, he came to the conclusion that his gentleman must, then, be in an embarrassing situation, and he might, conse-

quently, get the upper hand over him by the exercise of a little adroitness.

But Bussy had had some time for preparation, and was able to look forward to an encounter with his prince tranquilly.

"Let us talk, monseigneur," he answered.

"The last day we saw each other," said the duke, "you were very ill, my poor Bussy!"

"You are right, monseigneur," replied the young man. "I was very ill, and it was almost a miracle that saved me."

"On that day," continued the prince, "you were attended by a certain doctor whose zeal in your service rendered him quite rabid, for, if I remember aright, he snapped furiously at every one who attempted to come near you."

"You are right again, my prince, for Le Haudouin is very much attached to me."

"He insisted rigorously on your staying in bed, did he not?"

"Which drove me nearly frantic, as your highness must have noticed."

"But," said the duke, "if you had been really frantic you would have pitched all the doctors to the devil, and come with me when I asked you."

"Oh — perhaps — I am not quite" — stammered Bussy, twisting his apothecary's hat between his fingers.

"However," went on François, "the affair in which I was concerned might have had serious consequences, and no doubt you were afraid of getting compromised."

"What do you mean?" cried Bussy, immediately donning his hat and slouching it over his eyes; "have I heard aright? Did you say I was afraid of getting compromised?"

"I said so," retorted the prince.

Bussy bounded from his chair and drew himself up to his full height.

"Then you lied, monseigneur!" he cried, "understand me well — you lied to yourself, for you don't believe a word of all you have just said; I have twenty scars on my skin to show I have got compromised sometimes and been afraid never; and, in good faith, I know of plenty who cannot say as much and, above all, cannot show as much."

"You have always conclusive arguments at your fingers' ends, M. de Bussy," answered the duke, pale and agitated. "When you are accused you shout louder than your accuser, and then you fancy you are right."

"Oh, I am not always right, monseigneur," said Bussy, "I know that well, but I also know when I am wrong."

"And when are you wrong, might I ask you?"

"When I serve an ingrate."

"Really, monsieur, I think you forget yourself," said the prince, rising, with that air of dignity which he could very well assume on occasion.

"Oh, very well, monseigneur, I forget myself," retorted Bussy; "do you, for once in your life, do the same; forget yourself, or, at least, forget me."

And the young gentleman moved toward the door; but the prince was quicker than he, and barred his passage.

"Will you deny, monsieur," said the duke, "that on the very day you refused to accompany me you went out the moment I was gone?"

"I never deny anything, monseigneur," answered Bussy, "except what a person tries to force me to acknowledge."

"Tell me then why you were so obstinate in staying in your hotel."

"Because I had business."

"In your hotel?"

"There or elsewhere."

"I used to be under the impression that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was his prince's business."

"And who usually does your business, monseigneur, if not I?"

"I do not assert the contrary; ordinarily I have found you faithful and devoted; nay, I will say more, I think there is some excuse for your ill-temper."

"Ah, you are very kind."

"Yes, you had some reason to be angry with me."

"You admit that, monseigneur?"

"Yes, I had promised you to disgrace M. de Monsoreau. It seems you have a strong detestation for this M. de Monsoreau."

"Oh, not at all. I think he has an awfully ugly face, and I wished him away from court, so that I might not have to look at it. On the other hand, it is a face you are rather fond of. There is no use in disputing about tastes."

"Well, then, if that was your only reason for pouting at me like a spoiled, sulky child, I tell you you were doubly wrong

to refuse to go out with me and to go out afterward for the purpose of making a parade of your useless prowess?"

"Oh, I have made a parade of my useless prowess, have I? Why, just now, you accused me of — Come, come, monseigneur, it might be as well if we were a little consistent. By the way, what deeds of 'useless prowess' have I been engaged in?"

"Of course, I can easily understand your hatred of D'Épernon and Schomberg. I hate them myself, and mortally, too. But you ought to have been satisfied with hating them for the time, and wait for the critical moment."

"Oh, indeed!" said Bussy, "your words are mysterious, monseigneur; what do you mean?"

"Kill them, by heavens! Kill them both, kill the whole four of them, and you will never do anything that will please me better; but don't exasperate them, especially when you get away from Paris immediately after, for I become the victim of their exasperation."

"To the point, please; what is it I have done to the worthy Gascon?"

"You speak of D'Épernon, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Why, you had him pelted with stones."

"I?"

"Stoned to such good purpose that his doublet was in tatters, his cloak in rags, and, when he reached the Louvre, he had hardly anything on him except his breeches."

"Good!" said Bussy, "we have disposed of one of them. And now let us pass to the German. What injury have I done to M. de Schomberg?"

"Will you deny you had him dyed in indigo? When I saw him, three hours after his accident, he was still of a bright sky blue. And you call that a fine joke! Pshaw!"

And the prince had to laugh in spite of himself, while Bussy, at the recollection of the figure cut by Schomberg in the vat, fairly roared.

"So I am supposed, then," said he, "to be the person that played these nice tricks on them?"

"*Pardieu!* I suppose you will say it was I?"

"And yet you have the courage, monseigneur, to bring your accusations against a man capable of being the author of such sublime ideas! I put it to yourself, was I not right just now when I called you an ingrate?"

"Agreed, and, if you really left your hotel for that purpose, I pardon you."

"Sure?"

"Yes, upon my word of honor; but I have other grievances against you."

"Fire away."

"I want to say just a little about myself."

"As you like."

"What have you done to get me out of my very unpleasant predicament?"

"You see for yourself what I have done."

"No, I don't see it at all."

"Why, I started at once for Anjou."

"Which means that you ran away, to save yourself."

"Yes, for, by saving myself, I saved you."

"But, instead of going such a distance, don't you think you should have remained near Paris? It seems to me you would have been of more use to me at Montmartre than at Angers."

"Ah, there's where we differ, monseigneur; I preferred to go to Anjou."

"Your preference is hardly a reason. You must admit that this whim of yours" —

"Had for its object to recruit partisans for you."

"Oh, that puts another face on the question. Well, what have you done?"

"Time enough to explain all that to-morrow, monseigneur. I must leave you now."

"Why?"

"I have an appointment with one of the most influential persons in this country."

"Ah, if so, that is another matter; go, Bussy, but be prudent."

"Prudence be hanged! Are we not the strongest party here?"

"For all that, do not run any risks. Have you taken any steps so far?"

"And I only two days here; how could I?"

"At least, you keep yourself concealed, I hope."

"Keep myself concealed! I should think so, *mordieu!* Look at my costume; am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored doublets? For no one in the world but you would I swaddle myself in these frightful duds."

"And where do you lodge?"

"Ah! now, perhaps, you will appreciate my devotion! I lodge — I lodge in a rickety old barracks near the rampart and overlooking the river. But now it 's your turn, my prince, to answer questions. How did you get out of the Louvre? How was it I found you on the highway, with a broken-winded horse between your legs, and M. d'Aubigné at your side?"

"Because I have friends," said the prince.

"You — you have friends?" said Bussy. "Oh, that 's too good a joke!"

"Yes, friends of whom you know nothing."

"Splendid! — and who are those friends?"

"The King of Navarre and M. d'Aubigné, whom you saw."

"The King of Navarre — Ah, I had forgotten. Did you not conspire together, once upon a time?"

"I have never conspired, M. de Bussy."

"No? You had better inquire of Coconnas and La Mole."

"La Mole," said the prince, darkly, "had committed another crime besides the one for which he was put to death."

"Well, let us leave La Mole and return to yourself, especially as it is a subject upon which we should scarcely agree. How the devil did you get out of the Louvre?"

"Through the window."

"You don't say so! Through which one?"

"A window in my bedroom."

"Why, then, you must have known about the rope-ladder?"

"What rope-ladder?"

"The one in the closet."

"Ah!" exclaimed the prince, turning pale; "so it would seem you knew about it?"

"Why, surely, your highness must be aware I had sometimes had the good fortune to enter that chamber," said Bussy.

"In the time of my sister Margot, was it not? And you were able to enter through the window?"

"By my faith, it seems you were able to go out through it. The thing that puzzles me is how you managed to find the ladder."

"It was not I who found it."

"Who, then?"

"Nobody; I was told where to look for it."

"Who told you?"

"The King of Navarre."

"Ah, indeed! The King of Navarre knew of the ladder?

I should never have believed it. Well, well, monseigneur, the main point is that you are here, safe and sound, and in the best of health. We 'll have Anjou in a blaze in no time, and a spark from that same blaze will set Angoumois and Béarn in a flame; the whole thing will make a rather pretty conflagration."

"But did you not speak of an appointment?" said the duke.

"Ah, *morbleu!* yes; but your conversation is so interesting it made me forget all about it. Adieu, monseigneur."

"Do you take your horse with you?"

"Oh, no; if your highness find him useful, you may keep him. I have another."

"Then I accept; later on we 'll regulate our accounts."

"Very well, monseigneur, and God grant that I may not be again your debtor!"

"Why?"

"Because I do not like the man you usually charge with the auditing of your accounts."

"Bussy!"

"I beg your pardon, monseigneur; it was agreed, I know, that we should no longer refer to the past."

The duke, who knew that Bussy was necessary to him, offered him his hand.

Bussy took it in silence, but shaking his head.

Then they separated.

CHAPTER LVII.

SAINT-LUC'S DIPLOMACY.

Bussy returned home on foot in the middle of a foggy night, but, instead of Saint-Luc, whom he had expected, he found only a letter from his friend announcing his arrrival on the next day.

Accordingly, at about six the following morning, Saint-Luc, attended by a groom, started from Méridor and took his way to Angers.

He arrived on foot at the ramparts, just as the gates were opening, and, without noticing the strange excitement of the people at such an early hour, he went on to Bussy's lodgings. The two friends embraced cordially.

"Deign, my dear Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "to accept the

hospitality of my humble cabin. I am really camping at Angers."

"Yes," answered Saint-Luc, "after the fashion of conquerors, that is to say, on the field of battle."

"What do you mean, my dear friend?"

"That my wife no more thinks of keeping a secret from me than I think of keeping one from her, and that she has told me all. Pray accept my congratulations; and now, although I freely acknowledge you to be my superior in everything, still, since you have summoned me hither, I am going to take the liberty of giving you a bit of advice."

"Give it, by all means."

"Get rid of that abominable Monsoreau as speedily as you can: no one at court is aware of how you stand with his wife; now is your time, and you must not let the opportunity slip. When you marry the widow, later on, no one will then be able to say you made her a widow to marry her."

"There is only one difficulty in the way of this fine plan, a plan that came into my head as well as yours."

"Ha! So you thought of it, too; but what is the obstacle?"

"I promised Diane to respect the life of her husband — of course, only as long as he did not attack me."

"You were wrong."

"I!"

"Terribly wrong."

"Why?"

"Because nobody ought to make such a promise. Now I am going to tell you something and you may take my word for it it 's the truth. If you do not take time by the forelock and make short work of him, this is what will happen: Monsoreau, who is a perfect master in mischief, will find out everything, and, when he does, as he is the very reverse of chivalrous, he will assassinate you."

"That will be as God pleases," said Bussy, smiling; "but, apart from the fact that I should break my promise to Diane if I killed her husband" —

"Her husband! You know well he is no such thing."

"Yes, but that does not hinder him from being known as such. Apart, then, from the fact that I should break my promise to Diane, the whole world would fling stones at me, my dear fellow, and the man whom every one regards as a monster to-day would, as soon as he lay stretched on his bier,

be looked upon as a paragon sent to the tomb by my murderous hand."

"Oh, I did not mean to advise you to kill him yourself."

"Employ assassins! Ah, Saint-Luc, I did not expect such a sinister suggestion from you."

"Nonsense! Who speaks of assassins?"

"Then of what are you speaking?"

"Oh, of nothing, my friend; just an idea that flashed through my mind; it is hardly worth while telling you about it at present. I have as little love for Monsoreau as you have, although I have not the same reason for detesting him — But let us leave the husband and talk of the wife."

Bussy smiled.

"You are a trusty comrade, Saint-Luc, and you may count on my friendship. Now, as you are already aware, my friendship is composed of three things: my purse, my sword, and my life."

"Thanks," answered Saint-Luc, "I accept, but only on condition that I may have my turn also."

"Now, what did you wish to say about Diane?"

"I wished to ask if you are not coming to Méridor for an odd visit now and then."

"My dear friend, I thank you for your warm invitation, but you know my scruples."

"I know everything. At Méridor you fear to meet Monsoreau, although he is at present two hundred and forty miles away from us; you fear to have to shake hands with him, and it is hard to have to shake hands with a man you want to strangle; and, in short, you fear to see him embrace Diane, and it is hard to see the woman you love embraced by another."

"Ah!" cried Bussy, furiously; "how well you understand why I do not go to Méridor! Now, my dear friend"—

"You dismiss me," said Saint-Luc, misunderstanding Bussy's meaning.

"No, on the contrary, I request you to remain, for now it is my turn to ask questions."

"You may do so."

"Surely you must have heard last night the ringing of bells and the firing of musketoons?"

"Yes, and we were wondering what it was all about."

"And did you notice no change when you passed through the city this morning?"

"Quite a ripple of excitement among the people, was there not?"

"Yes."

"I was just going to ask you the cause of it."

"The cause of it was the duke's arrival last night, my dear friend."

Saint-Luc gave a jump that showed he could not have been more surprised if he were told that the devil himself was in Angers.

"The duke in the city! Why, we were told he was imprisoned in the Louvre."

"That is the very reason why he is now in Angers. He managed to escape through a window and has taken shelter here."

"What next?" inquired Saint-Luc.

"What next?" repeated Bussy. "Don't you see, my dear friend, what an excellent opportunity this affords you of getting even with the King for his petty persecutions. The prince has a party already, he will soon have an army, and we 'll soon have the train laid for a neat little civil war."

"Oh!" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

"And I reckoned on you and me drawing our swords in company."

"Against the King?" said Saint-Luc, with sudden coldness.

"Not exactly against the King," answered Bussy; "against those who draw the sword against us."

"My dear Bussy," said Saint-Luc, "I came to Anjou for the country air, not to fight against his Majesty."

"But you will allow me to present you to his highness?"

"Useless, my dear fellow; I am not fond of Angers, and I have been thinking of leaving it soon; it is a gloomy, tiresome sort of a place; the stones are as soft as cheeses, and the cheeses are as hard as stones."

"My dear Saint-Luc, you will do me a great service by consenting to yield to my request; the duke asked me what was my business in these quarters, and as I could not very well tell him, since he himself was something like a rejected lover of Diane, I have led him to believe my object in coming here was to gain the gentlemen of the district to his side; I even added that I had an appointment with one of them."

"Well, you can tell him the gentleman kept his appointment and requires six months for consideration."

"I see, my dear Saint-Luc, that you are, at least, as handy at chopping logic, if you will allow me to say so, as I am myself."

"Hear me, Bussy; the only thing I set store by in the world is my wife; the only thing you set store by is your mistress. Now, let us make a bargain: I promise to defend Diane on every occasion; you promise to defend Madame de Saint-Luc on every occasion. A treaty of love, if you like; a political treaty, never. Now you know the basis upon which we may work together."

"I see I must surrender, Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "for, at present, you have the advantage, — I need you, while you can do without me."

"Not at all. It is I, on the contrary, who must solicit your protection."

"Why so?"

"Suppose the Angevines — for I fancy that is the name the rebels will assume — should besiege and sack Méridor?"

"Ah! devil take me but you are right," said Bussy; "you would not care to have its tenants subjected to the consequences of a storming."

The two friends laughed. Then, as the firing of cannon in the city came to their ears, and as Bussy's valet came to inform him that the prince had already inquired for him three times, they swore anew to be faithful to their extra-political alliance, and parted with mutual regard.

Bussy ran to the ducal castle, now thronged with nobles from every part of the province. The news of the duke's arrival had spread like wildfire, and, in towns even ten or twelve miles from Angers, the intelligence had stirred up the people to something like an insurrection.

The count made haste to arrange an official reception, prepare a banquet, and make up speeches for the prince; he was pretty sure to have time to see Diane, at least for a few moments, while François was receiving, eating, and, above all, haranguing. As soon, then, as he had cut out a few hours' work for the prince, he returned to his lodgings, mounted his second horse, and galloped to Méridor.

As for the duke, he delivered some very eloquent discourses: that on the League produced a marvellous effect; he touched discreetly on the points connected with his alliance with the Guises, giving himself out as a prince persecuted by the

King solely because the Parisians had the utmost confidence in him.

While apparently listening to the speeches made in reply to his, and afterward offering his hand to be kissed, he was really taking note of the gentlemen who were present, and especially of those who had not yet arrived.

When Bussy came back to the palace it was four in the afternoon; he jumped off his horse and appeared before the duke, covered with dust and perspiration.

"Aha!" said the duke; "evidently, my brave Bussy, you have been at work."

"You see for yourself, monseigneur."

"You are in a terrible heat."

"I have had an awfully fast ride."

"Take care and don't fall sick; you are not yet entirely recovered, perhaps."

"There's no danger."

"Where have you come from?"

"From places round the city. Is your highness satisfied? Has there been a numerous attendance at your reception?"

"Yes, I am satisfied; but I noticed the absence of a certain individual at my reception, Bussy."

"Who was it?"

"Your protégé."

"My protégé?"

"Yes, the Baron de Méridor."

"Ah!" said Bussy, changing color.

"And yet I must not neglect him, though he neglect me. The baron has great influence in the province."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. He was the correspondent of the League at Angers; he had been selected for this post by M. de Guise, and, as a rule, the Guises choose their men well. He must come, Bussy."

"But if he do not come, monseigneur?"

"If he do not, why, I must make the advances, on my side, and go to him."

"Go to Méridor?"

"Why not?"

Bussy was unable to restrain the jealous and threatening flash that leaped from his eyes.

"In fact, why not?" said he; "you are a prince, and everything is permissible in a prince."

"Ah! I see — you think he is still angry with me?"

"I do not know. How could I?"

"You have not seen him, then?"

"No."

"But if you have been trying to gain over the influential men of the province, you must surely have had something to do with him."

"Undoubtedly I should, if he had not had something to do with me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I have not been so successful in fulfilling the promise I once made him to be in a great hurry to come into his presence."

"Has he not got what he wanted?"

"How?"

"He wanted the Comte de Monsoreau to marry his daughter, and Monsoreau has married her."

"Well, perhaps, monseigneur, it is as well to drop the subject," and Bussy turned his back on the prince.

At this moment several gentlemen entered who were new arrivals; the duke went to meet them, and Bussy was alone.

The prince's words had set him thinking.

What were the duke's real intentions with regard to the Baron de Méridor?

Were they those expressed by the prince? Was it his sole object to win to his cause the support of an old nobleman who was both powerful and universally respected? Or were his political plans used simply as the means of bringing him nearer to Diane?

Bussy turned over in his mind the prince's present situation: he had quarrelled with his brother, was an exile from the Louvre, the head of an insurrection in the province.

He put in one scale the duke's material interests; in the other his amorous fancies.

The first scale far outweighed the second one.

Bussy was disposed to forgive the duke all the other wrongs he had received at his hands, provided he spared him this one.

He spent the whole night banqueting with his royal highness and the Angevine gentlemen, making his best bows to

the Angevine ladies, and, when the violins were brought in, teaching these same fair ladies the newest dances.

It is needless to say that the women admired him, and their husbands hated him ; and, as some of the latter looked at him in a way Bussy did not like, he twisted his mustache defiantly some half dozen times or so, and politely requested three or four of these gentlemen to step out with him for a walk on the lawn.

But his reputation had preceded him at Angers, and Bussy's offer was respectfully declined.

CHAPTER LVIII.

HOW RÉMY RODE LIKE THE WILD HUNTSMAN AND ANSWERED LIKE THE SOBER SPARTAN.

Outside the gate of the ducal palace Bussy came upon a frank, faithful, laughing face he had believed to be two hundred and forty miles away.

"Ah!" cried he, joyfully, "so it 's you, Rémy!"

"Why, of course it is, monseigneur."

"I was on the point of asking you to join me."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor."

"Why, then, I 'm in luck. I was afraid you would scold me."

"And for what, pray?"

"For coming without leave. But, by my faith, as soon as I heard that the Duc d'Anjou had escaped from the Louvre and started for his province, I remembered that you were somewhere in the neighborhood of Angers. Then I said to myself, there was sure to be a civil war, with a good deal of cutting and thrusting on both sides, and a good number of holes bored in my neighbor's hide. So, as you know, as I love my neighbor as myself, and even more than myself, I ran up to have my share of the fun."

"You did well, Rémy ; I give you my word I missed you sadly."

"How is Gertrude, monseigneur?"

The count smiled.

"I promise to inquire of Diane the first time I see her," said he.

"And as one good turn deserves another," answered Rémy, "I will ask her, the first time I see her, for news of Madame de Monsoreau."

"You are a charming companion; and how did you manage to find me?"

"Faith, that was not a very difficult task; I asked where the ducal hotel was and waited for you at the gate, after putting my horse up in one of the prince's stables, where, God pardon me, I found yours."

"Yes, the prince had killed his; I lent him Roland, and, as he had no other, he kept him."

"That's just like you! It is you who are the prince, and the prince who is the servant."

"Do not exalt me to such a height, Rémy; you are going to see how your prince is lodged."

And, after saying this, he introduced Le Haudouin into his little house by the rampart.

"Now you see what the palace is like; lodge wherever you like, or, rather, wherever you can."

"That won't give me much trouble; I am not very exacting, as you know. Besides, I am so dead beat at present that I could sleep standing."

The two friends — for Bussy treated Le Haudouin more like a friend than a servant — separated, and Bussy, in higher spirits than ever, now that he had both Diane and Rémy near him, slept the sleep of the just.

The duke, too, must have slept soundly, for in order that he might have a chance of doing so, he requested his friends to stop firing the cannon and muskets; as for the bells they stopped of their own accord, thanks to the blistered hands of the ringers.

Bussy rose early and ran to the castle, ordering his valet to bid Rémy join him.

His purpose was to observe the face of his highness when he awoke. It is sometimes possible to catch on the features of the yawning and semi-somnolent person who has just been roused from his slumbers a reflection of the thoughts that are in his mind.

The duke was up, but it might have been said of him, as well as of his brother Henri, that he wore a mask while sleeping.

Bussy's early rising brought him no returns.

He had a whole catalogue of matters, one more important than another, ready for the inspection of the prince.

First, a tour round the walls to examine the fortifications.

Then, a review of the citizens and their arms.

Next, a visit to the arsenal and orders for supplies of all sorts of munitions.

After this, a careful examination of the taxes of the province, to see if it were not possible to induce his highness's leal and trusty vassals to supplement them by a few more little imposts on the common people.

Finally, the correspondence.

But Bussy was perfectly well aware he might not give himself much trouble about the last article; the Duc d'Anjou wrote little; even at that period the proverb "What is written remaineth," was in high favor.

So, armed to meet whatever evil designs might be in the mind of his prince, Bussy watched him as he opened his eyes, but could read nothing in those eyes.

"Ah!" murmured the duke, "you here already!"

"Why, of course, monseigneur, I could not sleep a wink the whole night; the affairs of your highness kept running in my head all the time. And now, what are we going to do this forenoon? Stay — I have it! What if we hunted?

"Good!" said Bussy to himself, "I thought of that on the spur of the moment; it would give him another occupation."

"Eh!" said the prince, "you say you were thinking of my interests the whole night, and the result of all your wakefulness and meditation is to propose to me that I should hunt? What nonsense!"

"You are right," said Bussy; "besides, we have n't a pack."

"Nor a grand huntsman, either," rejoined the prince.

"Egad, for my part, I should find the chase more pleasant without him."

"Well, I 'm not like you; I miss him."

The duke said this in such a singular tone that Bussy noticed it.

"It would seem," he answered, "that that worthy gentleman of whom you are so fond has done nothing for your deliverance any more than myself."

The duke smiled.

"Good," said Bussy to himself; "I know that smile, it is one of his evil smiles; look out for yourself, Monsoreau!"

"You still hate him?" asked the prince.

"Monsoreau?"

"Yes."

"Why should I hate him?"

"Because he is my friend."

"I pity him, on the contrary."

"What does that mean?"

"The higher you raise him, the lower he'll fall when he falls."

"Ah, I see now you are in high spirits."

"I?"

"Yes, that's the way you always talk to me when you are in high spirits — No matter," continued the duke, "I stand by what I said, and Monsoreau would have been very useful to me in this country."

"Why?"

"Because he has property in the neighborhood."

"He?"

"He or his wife."

Bussy bit his lips. The duke was bringing the conversation back to the point from which his follower had so much trouble in diverting him the evening before.

"Ah, you believe that, do you?" he said.

"Undoubtedly. Méridor is about nine or ten miles from Angers. Surely you ought to know that, since it was you that brought the old baron to me."

Bussy saw he must meet this new peril the best way he could.

"Hang it, yes!" said he, "I brought him to you, but why? Because he hung on to my cloak, and unless, like Saint Martin, I left the half of it between his fingers, I had to bring him — At all events, my protection was n't any great help to him."

"Listen," said the duke, "I have an idea."

"The devil you have!" answered Bussy, who had always distrusted his master's ideas.

"Yes, Monsoreau got the better of you once; this time it's you that shall get the better of him."

"What is your meaning, my prince?"

"It's quite simple. You know me, Bussy?"

"I have that misfortune."

"Do you think I am the man to endure an affront and let it pass unpunished?"

"That depends."

The smile of the duke was, if possible, even more baleful than his smile before, while he bit his lips, and shook his head up and down.

"Come, now, monseigneur," said Bussy, "pray explain yourself."

"Well, the grand huntsman stole from me a woman I loved, and made her his wife; now I, in my turn, will steal from him his wife and make her my mistress."

Bussy tried to smile, but all his efforts ended in a grimace.

"Steal M. de Monsoreau's wife!" he stammered.

"Why, nothing, it seems to me, is easier," said the duke. "The woman is now residing on her estate, and you have told me yourself that she detests her husband; I may, then, without any vanity, come to the conclusion that she will prefer me to Monsoreau, especially if I promise — what I shall promise."

"And what will you promise her, monseigneur?"

"To rid her of her husband."

"Ah, then," Bussy was on the point of crying, "why don't you do so at once?"

But he had the courage to control himself.

"You would do so fine a deed as that?"

"You shall see. Meanwhile I will pay a visit to Méridor."

"You would dare?"

"Why not?"

"You would force your way into the presence of the old baron whom you abandoned, after your promise to me"—

"I have an excellent excuse to offer."

"Where the devil are you going to find your excuse?"

"Oh, don't be uneasy. I shall say to him: 'I did not break that marriage, because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents of the League and that I was its chief, threatened to sell us both to the King.'"

"Ah! And is this really an invention of your highness?"

"Not entirely, I must admit," answered the duke.

"Then I understand," said Bussy.

"You understand?" repeated the duke, who was quite mistaken as to the real significance of Bussy's words.

"Yes."

"I shall make him believe that, by allowing Monsoreau to marry his daughter, I saved his life, which was in danger."

"A splendid idea!" said Bussy.

"Is n't it? Oh, by the way, now I think of it, please look out of the window."

"Why?"

"Do as I tell you."

"Very well, I 'm looking."

"What kind of weather is it?"

"I am forced to confess to your highness that it is very fine."

"Good. Order out the horses and we 'll go and find out how this old fogy Méridor is getting along."

"Immediately, monseigneur."

And Bussy, who for the last quarter of an hour had been acting the part of our embarrassed friend Mascarille, pretended to be going out, went as far as the door, and returned.

"Excuse me, monseigneur, but how many horses did you order?"

"Oh, four or five — as many as you like."

"Then, if you leave the decision of the matter to me, monseigneur," said Bussy, "I shall order out a hundred."

"Oh, a hundred, if you wish," answered the astonished prince; "but what do you want with so many?"

"Because then I can rely on about a quarter of them to do their duty if we are attacked."

The duke started.

"If we are attacked?" he asked.

"Yes," continued Bussy; "I have heard that that district is covered with woods, and it would not be at all strange if we fell into an ambuscade."

"Ah!" exclaimed the duke; "do you think so?"

"Your highness is aware that true courage does not exclude prudence."

The duke was reflecting.

"I 'll order out a hundred and fifty," said Bussy, moving a second time toward the door.

"Stop a moment," said the prince.

"What is the matter, monseigneur?"

"Do you believe I am safe in Angers?"

"Well, the city is not strong; but, if well defended" —

"Yes, if well defended; but it may not be well defended. Brave as you are, Bussy, you cannot be in more than one place at the same time."

"Probably not."

"If I am not safe in the city, — and it is clear I am not, since Bussy has his doubts" —

"I did not say I had any doubts, monseigneur."

"Oh, yes! of course, I understand you; if I am not safe, I must take prompt measures to secure my safety."

"Your words are golden, monseigneur."

"So I will examine the castle, and intrench myself within it."

"You are right, monseigneur; but see to it that the intrenchments be good ones."

Bussy stammered; he was afraid, and, until now, fear and he had been strangers; he could not think of anything to say that might help him.

"And then, I have another idea," said the prince.

"This morning is fruitful, monseigneur," retorted Bussy.

"I shall bring the Méridors here."

"Monseigneur, your thoughts exhibit such profundity and wisdom to-day that really — but get up and let us visit the castle."

The prince summoned his servants, and this gave Bussy an opportunity to slip out for a moment.

He found Le Haudouin in one of the apartments. He was the man he wanted to see.

He took him into the duke's cabinet, wrote a few lines, passed into the conservatory, gathered a bunch of roses, rolled the note about the stems, went to the stable, saddled Roland, gave the roses to Rémy, and ordered him to get into the saddle at once. Then, leading him outside the city, as Haman did Mordecai, he turned the horse into a lane.

"Now," said he, "give Roland free rein; at the end of this lane you will find the forest, in the forest a park, round the park a wall, and at that part of the wall where Roland halts, you will throw over it the bunch of flowers."

These were the words of the note:

"He whom you expected will not come, because he whom neither of us expected has come, and is more dangerous than ever, for he still loves. Seize with your lips and heart whatever is invisible to your eyes on this paper."

Rémy obeyed Bussy's directions with regard to Roland, who at once broke into a gallop in the direction of Méridor.

Bussy returned to the ducal palace and found the prince dressed.

As for Rémy, he did his work in half an hour. Borne along like a cloud by the wind, and having the most perfect trust in his master's words, he dashed through meadow and fields and streams and woods, until he came to the bottom of a somewhat damaged wall, whose summit was clothed with ivy and shaded by the branches of tall oaks.

Then Rémy stood up in his stirrups, tied the paper about the stems of the roses more solidly than it had been done before, and, uttering a loud "hem!" flung the bouquet over the wall.

A little cry from the other side of the wall told him the message had arrived safely.

Rémy had nothing further to do there, for he had not been told to wait for a reply.

So he turned the head of the horse in the direction from which he had come, much to the disgust of Roland, who gave practical evidence of his disappointment at being deprived of the feast of acorns he had enjoyed during his previous visits. But Rémy made such a vigorous use of whip and spur that the animal, although not forgetting his wrongs, started into the usual gallop.

Forty minutes later Roland was in his new stable and making up for his disappointment at Méridor by a plenteous repast at a rack filled with hay and a manger overflowing with oats.

Bussy was with the prince, inspecting the castle.

Rémy came up with him at the moment when he was examining a subterranean passage leading to a postern.

"Well!" the count asked his messenger, "what have you seen? what have you heard? what have you done?"

"A wall; a cry; twenty-one miles," answered Rémy, with the brevity of one of those Spartan youths who used to allow their entrails to be devoured by foxes for the greater glory of the laws of Lycurgus.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE FLIGHT OF THE ANGEVINES.

Bussy succeeded so well in interesting the Duc d'Anjou in his warlike preparations that for two whole days his highness had not time either to think of going to Méridor or of bringing the baron to Angers.

Occasionally, however, the duke recurred to the idea of paying his intended visit.

But when he did so, Bussy's activity assumed portentous proportions; he examined the muskets of the entire guard, had the horses put through their exercises, the cannon roaring and the gun-carriages rattling, as if there was question of conquering the fifth part of the world.

When Rémy saw this condition of things, he set about making lint, sharpening his tools, and concocting his salves, as if, in his opinion, there was question of patching up the half of the human race.

The enormous nature of the work going on engrossed the duke's mind wholly for the time.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Bussy, under the pretext of inspecting the outer fortifications, jumped now and then on Roland, and, in less than forty minutes, arrived at a certain wall which he climbed the more easily that, at every previous ascent, he had tipped over a stone or two, so that by this time he had almost made a breach in the enclosure.

As for Roland, he did not require any one to tell him where he was going. All Bussy had to do was to drop the reins and shut his eyes.

"Well, I have gained two days," thought Bussy; "the very devil 's in it if the next two don't bring me a little good luck."

Bussy was not quite wrong in counting on his luck.

Toward the evening of the third day, as an enormous convoy of provisions was entering the city, the result of an assessment levied by the duke on his leal and trusty Angevines, and just as M. d'Anjou, to show what an amiable prince they had, was munching the black bread of his soldiers and soiling his beautiful teeth with their salt herrings and dried cod, toward the evening of the third day, we repeat, a terrible uproar was heard at the gates of the city.

M. d'Anjou inquired the cause of this uproar, but nobody could tell him.

At the spot from which the noise proceeded, there was quite a commotion, and the handles of halberds and butt ends of muskets were plied freely, some of the good citizens, attracted thither by curiosity, coming in for their share of the blows.

This was the cause of the excitement.

A man, mounted on a white horse streaming with perspiration, had appeared at the barrier of the Porte de Paris.

Now Bussy, as a result of his system of browbeating, had compelled his prince to appoint him captain-general of Anjou and grand master of the fortresses. He had established the severest discipline everywhere, but especially in Angers; no one could leave or enter the city unless he knew the watchword.

The real object of all this strict discipline was to prevent the duke from sending any person to Diane without his knowledge, and to make sure that, if Diane entered the city, he should be the first to learn of her arrival.

Bussy's conduct may, perhaps, appear a little extravagant; but fifty years later Buckingham committed follies quite as extravagant for the sake of Anne of Austria.

The man on the white horse had, then, as we have said already, arrived at a furious gallop and ridden straight up to the post.

But the captain of the post had his orders.

These orders had been transmitted to the sentry, who barred the way with his partisan; as the cavalier had shown but little respect for the action of the sentry, the latter had cried:

"To arms!"

Thereupon the post had turned out and its captain had demanded an explanation.

"I am Antraguet," said the cavalier, "and I wish to speak with the Duc d'Anjou."

"We are not acquainted with any Antraguet," the captain had answered; "but your wish to speak shall be gratified, for we are going to arrest you and bring you before his highness."

"Arrest me!" the cavalier had cried; "you must be a saucy knave to think of arresting Charles de Balzac d'Entragues, Baron de Cuneo and Comte de Graville."

"But it's the very thing we are going to do," said the worthy citizen, adjusting his gorget, and feeling that he had a score of men behind him and only one before him.

"Wait a moment, my good friends," said Antraguet. "You don't know the Parisians yet, do you? Well I am going to show you a sample of what they can do."

"Arrest him! Bring him before monseigneur!" cried the furious citizen-soldiers.

"Softly, my little Angevine lambs," said Antraguet, "I am going to have the pleasure of showing you something."

"What 's that he says?" cried several voices.

"He says his horse has only travelled thirty miles and will ride over you all if you don't step aside. Step aside, then, or *ventre-bœuf!*" —

And as the good tradesmen of Angers had evidently had but slight acquaintance with Parisian oaths, Antraguet had drawn his sword and, with one stupendous sweep, had cut off the blades of the nearest halberds, whose points were presented at him; in less than ten minutes, fifteen or twenty halberds were changed into broom-handles.

The enraged citizens aimed their blows at the newcomer, who parried them with prodigious dexterity, now in front, now behind, now on the right hand, now on the left, laughing boisterously all the time.

"Ah! what a glorious entry I'm making!" said he, almost convulsed, "what polite creatures are the townsfolk of Angers! *Morbleu*, what an entertainment they have provided for me! It was a lucky thought of the prince to come here, and of myself to follow him!"

And Antraguet not only kept on parrying, but, now and then, when he was too closely pressed, he cut through the hat of one, the sallet of another, occasionally stunning with the flat of his sword some imprudent warrior who rushed into the thick of the fight with no better protection for his head than his simple cap of Angevine wool.

The maddened townsfolk fought on, maiming one another in their zeal to get in a stroke, and when beaten back, returning to the charge; like the soldiers of Cadmus, it might have been said of them that they sprang from the ground.

Antraguet was beginning to feel that he could not stand it much longer.

"Come, now," said he, when he saw that the ranks of his enemies were growing thicker; "we have had enough of this. You are as brave as lions, and I am ready to bear testimony to the fact. But you see you have nothing left but the handles of

your halberds and you don't know how to load your muskets. I was determined on entering the city, but I was not aware it was defended by an army of Cæsars. I renounce the task of trying to conquer you. Good day, adieu, I am leaving you; but tell the prince I came from Paris expressly to see him."

Meanwhile the captain had succeeded in lighting the match of his musket, but just as he was about to take aim, Antraguet struck him so violently on the fingers with his flexible cane that he dropped the weapon and began hopping alternately on his right foot and his left.

"Kill him! Kill him!" cried the bruised and furious warriors, "don't let him get away! Don't let him escape!"

"Oh, indeed!" cried Antraguet, "you would n't let me in a few minutes ago, and now you won't let me out. Then take care of yourselves! You force me to change my tactics and use the point of my sword instead of the flat; now it 's wrists that I'll have to cut off, not halberd blades. Come, now, my lambs of Anjou, won't you let me leave you?"

"No, kill him! Kill! He 's tired out! Knock him off his horse!"

"Very well; so the game is to be played in good earnest, is it?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Then look out for your fingers, for you'll soon be without hands!"

Scarcely had he finished and made ready to put his threat into execution, when another cavalier appeared above the horizon, galloped to the barrier at the same frantic pace, and fell like a thunderbolt among the combatants, now engaged in a real conflict.

"Antraguet!" cried the stranger, "Antraguet, I say! What the devil are you doing in the midst of these townspeople?"

"Livarot!" cried Antraguet, turning round, "ah, *mordieu!* you come in the nick of time; *Montjoie et Saint-Denis,* to the rescue!"

"I knew well I should overtake you; I heard, four hours ago, that you had gone before me, and I have been following you ever since. But how the devil did you get mixed up with this rabble? Do they want to massacre you?"

"Yes; these are our Angevine friends, if you please, and they will neither let me come in nor go out."

"Gentlemen," said Livarot, taking off his hat, "be so kind as to step aside and let us pass."

"They are insulting us," cried the townsfolk. "Kill them! Kill them both!"

"Ah, these are the sort of people that live in Angers," said Livarot, putting his hat on his head with one hand, and drawing his sword with the other.

"You see what they are," answered Antraguet. "Unluckily, there are so many of them."

"Bah! we three will soon make short work of them."

"We might if we were three; but we are only two."

"Ribeirac is behind us."

"He, too?"

"Do you not hear him?"

"I see him. Hollo, Ribeirac! Hollo! Come here!"

In fact, at that very moment Ribeirac was making the same headlong dash into the city of Angers that his companions had made before him.

"Oho! so there 's a fight on hand! That 's what I call a godsend! Good day, Antraguet; good day, Livarot."

"Let us charge them," answered Antraguet.

The citizen soldiers stared in bewilderment at this new auxiliary of their two opponents, who were now about to pass from the condition of the assailed to that of assailants.

"Mercy on us!" said the captain, "there must be a regiment of them!" Then to his soldiers: "Gentlemen, our order of battle is evidently faulty, and I propose that we wheel to the left."

The worthy tradesmen, with the skill that ordinarily characterizes the military movements of their class, at once began to wheel to the right.

Moreover, apart from the suggestion to act prudently contained in the invitation of their captain, the martial air of the three cavaliers in front of them was calculated to confuse the most intrepid.

"It is their vanguard!" cried such of the citizens as wished to have an excuse for running away. "The enemy! The enemy!"

"Fire!" shouted others, "fire! fire!"

"We are fathers of families, and our lives belong to our wives and children. Fly!" exclaimed the captain.

The natural result of these cries, all springing from the same

cause and having the same object, was, as we have seen, a frightful tumult in the streets, and many of the crowd that ran out of doors to discover what was the matter were beaten black and blue by the warriors, who, in their terror, were making the most violent efforts to force a passage through their inquisitive fellow-townsmen.

It was at this moment that the noise of the uproar reached the castle, where, as we have said, the Duc d'Anjou was sampling the black bread, sour herrings, and dried cod of his partisans.

Bussy and the prince made inquiries; they were told that the entire disturbance was created by three demons in human guise from Paris.

"Three men!" said the prince; "go and see who they are, Bussy."

"Three men!" repeated Bussy; "come along with me, monseigneur."

And the two started, Bussy in front, the prince prudently following him, and accompanied by a score of horsemen.

They arrived just as the citizen soldiers were about to execute the manœuvre of which we have spoken, to the great detriment of the skulls and shoulders of the curious.

Bussy stood up in his stirrups, and his eagle eye soon recognized the long face of Livarot.

"*Mort de ma vie!* Come on, monseigneur; it is our friends of Paris who are besieging us."

"No!" answered Livarot, in a voice of thunder; "it is, on the contrary, your friends of Anjou who are having a fling at us."

"Down with your weapons!" cried the duke; "down with your weapons, knaves; these are friends."

"Friends!" cried the ill-treated, bruised, and wounded warriors. "Friends! Then why has not the watchword been given to them? For a full hour we have been treating them like pagans, and they have been treating us like Turks."

And the retreat of the citizen soldiers was now accomplished in regular order.

Livarot, Antraguet, and Ribeirac marched triumphantly into the space left vacant by the retreat of their antagonists, and hurried eagerly to kiss the hand of his highness; after which, each in his turn embraced Bussy.

"Monseigneur," whispered the latter in his master's ear, "count the number of your soldiers present."

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, no matter. I don't want you to count them one by one, but try and guess at the number."

"I suppose there might be a hundred and fifty, at least."

"At least — yes."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean that they must be a rather strange sort of soldiers, since three men beat them."

"Quite true," said the duke. "What follows?"

"What follows? You would n't think of venturing out of the city with such a rabble-rout as that!"

"Yes," answered the duke, "for I 'll make sure to take with me the three men who have beaten them."

"Ugh!" murmured Bussy to himself. "I had never thought of that. Your dastard is your only true logician."

CHAPTER LX.

ROLAND.

Thanks to the arrival of these three partisans, the Duc d'Anjou was enabled to make investigations in every quarter outside the walls of his city.

Accompanied by the friends who had arrived at such an opportune moment, he moved about surrounded by all the pomp of war, to the immense pride of the honest citizens, although a comparison between the well-mounted, well-equipped gentlemen in his train and the urban militia, with its splintered and rusty armor, would hardly redound to the advantage of the latter.

First he reconnoitred the ramparts; then the gardens bordering on the ramparts; then the country bordering on the gardens; lastly the castles scattered over this country. And he expressed his contempt, in his most arrogant manner, for the woods that had lately been such objects of terror to him, or, rather, which Bussy had rendered such objects of terror to him.

The Angevine gentlemen who had arrived had plenty of money.

They enjoyed at the court of the Duc d'Anjou a freedom they were far from experiencing at the court of Henri III.;

they could not fail, therefore, to lead a joyous life in a city which was disposed — as is, indeed, the duty of every capital that respects itself to do — to rifle the purses of its guests.

Before three days had slipped by Antraguet, Ribeirac, and Livarot had become intimate with such of the Angevine nobles as had a partiality for the modes and fashions of Paris.

It is hardly necessary to state that these worthy lords were married and had young and pretty wives.

So it was not for his own individual pleasure, as might have been supposed by those acquainted with the selfishness of the Duc d'Anjou, that he created the splendid pageants and cavalcades that became now common in the city. Oh, no.

These processions were a source of pleasure to the Parisian gentlemen who had joined him, to the Angevine nobles, and, above all, to the Angevine ladies.

God must have taken especial delight in them, for the cause of the League was also God's cause.

On the other hand, they must have, undoubtedly, exasperated the King.

But what matter? The ladies were delighted.

So the great Trinity of the period was duly represented: God, the King, and the ladies.

The general joy was at its height when twenty-two riding-horses, thirty carriage-horses, and forty mules, with litters, carriages, and wagons, were seen to enter Angers, all for the special service of his highness the Duc d'Anjou.

The entire equipment had been purchased at Tours for the trifling sum of fifty thousand crowns, which the duke had laid aside for this purpose.

We must admit that, though the horses were saddled, the saddles were not paid for; we must also admit that, though the coffers had magnificent locks, and had been locked with great care, the coffers were empty.

It is but fair to point out, however, that the last circumstance was greatly to the prince's credit, since he might have filled them by the employment of extortionate measures.

Still, it was not in his nature to take things openly; he preferred to purloin them.

Nevertheless, the entrance of this long train produced a magnificent effect in Angers.

The horses were sent to the stables, the carriages to the coach-houses.

The coffers were carried by the prince's most trusty confidants.

It would have been worse than madness to confide to unsafe hands the sums they did not contain.

At length, the palace gates were shut in the face of an excited multitude, convinced by this far-seeing plan that the prince had just brought two millions into the city, while, on the contrary, the empty coffers, if they could speak, would say that they expected to leave the city with something like that amount.

The Duc d'Anjou's reputation for opulence was, from that day forward, solidly established; and the whole province was positive, after the spectacle it had witnessed, that he was rich enough to make war on all Europe, if he chose.

This confidence was a great help to the citizens in enabling them to bear patiently the new taxes which, by the advice of his friends, the prince had decided to levy on the Angevines.

We never regret the money we lend or give to the rich.

The King of Navarre, with his reputation for poverty, would never have obtained a quarter of the success which the Duc d'Anjou obtained through his reputation for wealth.

But let us return to our duke.

The excellent prince was living like a patriarch; in fact, living on the fat of the land, and every one knows Anjou is a fat country.

The highways were covered with horsemen galloping to Angers to make their submission to the prince or offer him their services.

M. d'Anjou, on his side, did not conceal the fact that all his explorations had in view the finding of some treasure or other.

So Bussy took good care that none of these explorations should be pushed as far as the castle inhabited by Diane.

There was a treasure there that Bussy reserved for himself alone, a treasure which, after defending itself in due form, had at last surrendered at discretion.

Now, while M. d'Anjou was exploring in hopes of finding a treasure, and while Bussy was guarding his, M. de Monsoreau, mounted on his hunter, was drawing nigh the gates of Angers.

It was about four in the afternoon, and, to arrive at that hour, M. de Monsoreau had ridden fifty-four miles.

So, his spurs were red; and his horse, white with foam, was half dead.

Those who came to the city gates now had no difficulty in passing through; in fact, the worthy burghers had grown so proud and scornful that they would have let in a battalion of Swiss without making the slightest objection, though these Swiss were commanded by the brave Crillon himself.

M. de Monsoreau, who was not a Crillon, rode straight through, merely saying:

"I am going to the palace of his highness the Duc d'Anjou."

He did not wait for the answer of the guards who shouted their answer after him.

His horse kept on his legs, the marvellous equilibrium of the animal being apparently due to the speed at which he was travelling. The poor beast held his ground, but it looked as if he should fall as soon as he came to a stop. He halted at the palace; M. de Monsoreau was a splendid equestrian, his steed was a thoroughbred; both horse and rider remained standing.

"M. le Duc!" cried the grand huntsman.

"His highness has gone with a reconnoitring party," answered the sentry.

"Where?" asked M. de Monsoreau.

"In that direction," said the sentry, pointing to one of the four cardinal points.

"The devil!" said Monsoreau, "what I had to say to the prince cannot be delayed. What am I to do?"

"Put your horse in the stable," was the answer, "for, if you don't prop him against a wall, he'll drop."

"Your advice is prudent. Where are the stables, my good fellow."

"Down below, monsieur."

At this moment a man approached the gentleman and gave him his name and rank.

It was the major-domo.

M. de Monsoreau, in turn, told his name, surname, and rank.

The major-domo bowed respectfully; the grand huntsman's name was well known in Anjou.

"Monsieur," said he, "have the goodness to enter and take some repose. His highness went out about ten minutes ago, and will not be back before eight to-night."

"Eight to-night," rejoined M. de Monsoreau, biting his mustache. "I should have to lose too much time. I am the bearer of

important intelligence which the prince must know at once. Can you furnish me with a horse and guide ?"

"A horse! you can have ten, monsieur," said the major-domo; "but as for a guide, it is a different matter. Monseigneur has not told any one where he is going, so a guide could do nothing for you; besides, I should not care to lessen the number of soldiers in the garrison. I have been specially charged by his highness not to do so."

"Ah!" exclaimed the grand huntsman, "so you are not safe here ?"

"Oh, monsieur, there is always safety in the company of such men as Messieurs Bussy, Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguet, without counting our invincible prince, his highness the Duc d'Anjou; but you understand"—

"Yes, I understand that, when they are absent, there is less security."

"Undoubtedly, monsieur."

"Then I shall take a fresh horse from the stable and try to come up with his highness by making inquiries."

"There is reason for hoping that, by doing so, you may come on the track of his highness."

"Did the cavalcade gallop when it started ?"

"No, it went slowly."

"Very well, that settles it; show me the horse I am to take."

"Go into the stable, monsieur, and choose for yourself; they all belong to his highness."

"Very well."

Monsoreau entered the stable.

Ten or twelve of the finest and freshest horses were feeding at mangers filled with the most palatable grain and provender to be found in Anjou.

"There they are," said the major-domo, "you can choose."

Monsoreau looked at the animals with the eye of a connoisseur.

"I 'll take that brown bay," said he; "have him saddled."

"Roland ?" asked the major-domo.

"He is called Roland, then ?"

"Yes, he is the favorite horse of his highness, who rides him every day; he was given to him by M. de Bussy, and, certainly, you would not have found him in the stable to-day only that his highness wished to try some new horses he has received from Tours."

"Well, you see I am not a very bad judge."

A groom approached.

"Saddle Roland," said the major-domo.

As to Monsoreau's own steed, he had entered the stable of his own accord and lain down on the litter without waiting until his harness was taken off.

Roland was saddled in a few seconds.

Monsoreau leaped lightly on his back and inquired a second time in what direction the cavalcade had started.

"It started through that gate and followed yonder street," answered the major-domo, pointing in the direction already indicated by the sentry.

"Upon my word," said Monsoreau, on perceiving that, when he slackened the reins, the horse took that very road, "Roland acts as if he were following the scent."

"Oh, do not be uneasy," said the major-domo. "I heard M. de Bussy and his physician, M. Rémy, say that Roland is the most intelligent animal in existence. As soon as he catches the odor of his comrades, he will join them; see what beautiful legs he has — a stag might envy them."

Monsoreau leaned over to look at them.

"Magnificent," said he.

In fact, the animal started off without waiting for whip or spur, and passed deliberately out of the city; he even took a short cut, before reaching the gate, at a point where the road was bifurcated, the path to the left being circular, that to the right straight, and thus abridged the distance.

While giving this proof of his intelligence, the horse shook his head is if to escape from the bridle which weighed on his lips; he seemed to be saying to his rider that compulsion was entirely unnecessary, and, the nearer he approached the city gate, the more rapid was his pace.

"Really," murmured Monsoreau, "he deserves all the praise he has received; very well, as you know your way so perfectly, go on, Roland, go on."

And he dropped the reins on the horse's neck.

When Roland reached the outer boulevard he hesitated a moment to consider whether he should turn to the right or left.

He turned to the left.

A peasant was just then passing.

"Have you seen a company of horsemen, my friend?" asked Monsoreau.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the rustic. "I met them yonder, in front of you."

The peasant pointed exactly in the direction which Roland had taken.

"Go on, Roland, go on," said the grand huntsman, slackening the reins of his steed, who broke into a trot that, if continued for an hour, would carry him ten or twelve miles.

The horse, after following the boulevard for some time, suddenly wheeled to the right and entered a flowery lane, which cut across the country.

Monsoreau was in doubt whether he should stop Roland or not, but the animal appeared to know his business so thoroughly that he decided not to interfere with him.

According as the horse advanced, he grew more and more lively, passed from a trot to a gallop, and, in less than a quarter of an hour, the city had vanished from the eyes of his rider.

Monsoreau, too, seemed to recognize the localities, the farther he advanced.

"Why," said he, on entering a wood, "it looks as if one were going to Méridor. Can his highness have ridden in the direction of the castle?"

And his face grew black at the thought which had now entered his mind for the first time.

"Ah!" he murmured, "I who came first to see the prince, and put off my visit to my wife till to-morrow! What if I should have the happiness to see them both at the same time?"

A terrible smile passed over the lips of the grand huntsman.

The horse never slackened his pace, always keeping to the right with a tenacity that showed how perfectly he knew the direction in which he was going.

"Why, upon my soul," thought Monsoreau, "I am sure now that I cannot be very far from the park of Méridor."

At this moment the horse began to neigh.

There was immediately a responsive neigh from the depth of the foliage.

"Ah," said the grand huntsman to himself, "apparently Roland has found his comrade."

The horse now went with double speed, passing like a flash under the tall trees.

Suddenly Monsoreau saw a wall and a horse fastened near the wall.

This horse neighed, and Monsoreau knew it was the same horse that had neighed before.

"There is some one here!" said he, turning pale.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT M. DE MONSOREAU CAME TO ANNOUNCE.

There was a renewal of M. de Monsoreau's amazement at every turn; the wall of Méridor, suddenly revealed to him as it were by enchantment, and yonder horse's acquaintance and friendliness with the horse he rode, were circumstances certainly calculated to raise suspicions in the most sceptical soul.

When he approached — and it may be easily guessed that his approach was not slow — he noticed the dilapidated state of the wall at this particular spot; it was not unlike a ladder, and threatened soon to become a breach; steps had apparently been hollowed out for the feet, and twigs that had been caught at and half torn away were hanging from the injured branches.

The count embraced the whole condition of things at a glance, then he examined into details.

The indiscreet animal's saddle was furnished with a saddle-cloth embroidered in silver.

In one of the corners was a double FF interlacing a double AA.

Beyond a doubt, the horse came from the prince's stables, for the cipher was that of François d'Anjou.

At this sight the suspicion of the count changed to consternation.

The duke, then, had come to this part of the wall; he had come often, since, beside the horse tied yonder, there was another horse that knew the way.

Monsoreau arrived at the conclusion that as he was now on the track, he must follow this track to the bitter end.

The experience gained by the grand huntsman would be useful to the jealous husband.

But as long as he remained on this side of the wall it was

evident he could see nothing. So he tied up his horse near to the other, and bravely began the ascent.

It was easy enough, one foot seemed calling to the other; there were places for the hands to rest on; the curve of an arm was outlined on the stones on the surface of the summit, and a hunting-knife had carefully lopped off the branches of an oak that had interfered with the view and embarrassed the movements of the climber, whose efforts had been crowned with entire success.

M. de Monsoreau was no sooner settled in his place of observation than he perceived a blue mantilla and a black velvet cloak lying at the foot of a tree.

The mantilla undoubtedly belonged to a woman, and the black cloak to a man; moreover, he had not to search far for the owners; a man and a woman were walking arm in arm about fifty paces from where he stood, with their backs turned to the wall, and hidden also by the foliage of the bush.

Unluckily for M. de Monsoreau, he had not accustomed the wall to his movements, and a big stone, loosened from the coping, fell down, breaking the branches on the grass and making a loud noise.

Hearing the crash, the persons hidden from M. de Monsoreau by the bush apparently turned round and saw him, for a woman's significant cry was heard; then the rustling of the foliage told the count that they were running away like startled deer.

At the cry of the woman, drops of anguish stood on Monsoreau's forehead. He had recognized Diane's voice. Incapable of resisting the furious impulse that hurried him on, he leaped down, and, sword in hand, sought to cut his way through the bushes and branches.

But they had vanished, nothing troubled the silence of the park; not a shadow in the depths of the avenues, not a trace on the paths, not a sound in the thickets, save the warbling of the nightingales and finches, which, accustomed to the sight of the lovers, were no longer alarmed by their presence.

What could he do in the midst of such a solitude? What should be his resolve? In what direction should he run? The park was immense; he might, during his pursuit of those he sought, meet those he was not seeking.

M. de Monsoreau decided that the discovery he had made was sufficient for the moment; besides, he felt that he was too

violently excited to act with the prudence indispensably needed to be successful against a rival so formidable as François; for he no longer doubted that the prince was his rival.

Then, whether it was he or not, he had to fulfil an urgent mission to the Duc d'Anjou; when he was face to face with the prince, he would know what to think of his guilt or of his innocence.

And now a sublime idea flashed through his mind.

It was to cross the wall again at the spot where he had climbed it, and carry off the horse of the intruder he had surprised in the park along with his own.

This vengeful design gave him renewed strength; he turned and ran back to the wall, where he arrived gasping and covered with perspiration.

Then, aided by the branches, he reached the top and jumped on the other side; but on the other side there was no horse or, rather, there were no horses.

His idea was so excellent that, before coming to him, it had come to his enemy, and his enemy had anticipated him.

M. de Monsoreau, completely crushed, uttered a howl of rage, shaking his clenched hand at the demon who must now be laughing at him in some dark recess of the wood; but his was a will not easily vanquished; he determined to withstand the fatal influences that seemed bent on successively overwhelming him; that very instant even, he set about finding his way back to Angers; in spite of the night that was rapidly falling, he summoned up all his strength and, following a cross-road which he knew from childhood, he again entered the city.

When, after a walk of two hours and a half, he had arrived at the city gate, he was almost half-dead from thirst, heat, and weariness; but his excitement and fury furnished him with renewed strength, and he was soon the same man he had ever been, at once violent and resolute.

Moreover he derived support from a certain thought that had entered his mind: he would question the sentry, or rather every sentry; he would go from gate to gate; he would know by which of the gates a man had entered with two horses; he would empty his purse, would make golden promises, and would have a description of this man.

Then, no matter who this man might be, he should pay him his debt, sooner or later.

He questioned the sentry; the sentry had only just been placed on duty and knew nothing; he entered the guard-house, and made inquiries there.

The soldier who had been last on guard said that about two hours before a horse without a rider had passed through the gate and had taken the road to the palace.

He had then thought some accident must have happened to his rider, and that the intelligent animal had returned to his stable of his own accord.

Monsoreau struck his forhead: it was fated that he should discover nothing.

Then he directed his steps to the ducal palace.

In the palace was great animation, great noise, and much joyous excitement; the windows shone like suns, and the kitchens gleamed like glowing ovens, sending forth odors enticing enough to make the stomach forget that it is the neighbor of the heart.

However, the wickets were closed, and there might be a difficulty in having them opened; but have them opened he must.

He called the concierge and gave him his name; the concierge refused to recognize him.

"You were erect," said he, "and now you are bent."

"From fatigue."

"You were pale and now you are red."

"From the heat."

"You were on horseback and now you are on foot."

"Because my horse took fright, bolted, threw me, and returned without a rider."

"Ah, that is as may be," said the concierge.

"At all events, go and call the major-domo."

The concierge, delighted at seeing his way to a means of avoiding all responsibility, sent for M. Rémy, who at once recognized Monsoreau.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "where have you come from that you are in such a condition?"

Monsoreau repeated the same invention he had retailed to the concierge.

"In fact," said the major-domo, "we were very anxious when we saw the horse returning without a rider — especially monseigneur, to whom I had the honor of announcing your arrival."

"Ah! monseigneur seemed anxious?" inquired Monsoreau.

"Very anxious, indeed."

"What did he say?"

"That you must be shown in immediately on your arrival."

"Very well; I will take time only to visit the stable and see if anything has happened to his highness's horse."

Monsoreau passed into the stable and found the intelligent animal in the stall he had taken him from; he was feeding like a horse that felt he must recruit his strength.

Then, without seeking to change his dress, for Monsoreau believed the importance of the news he was bringing dispensed him from observing the rules of etiquette, the grand huntsman directed his steps to the dining-room. All the prince's gentlemen, and his highness as well, gathered around a table magnificently served and lighted, were attacking the pheasent pies, broiled boar-steaks, and spiced side-dishes which they watered with the dark-colored wine of Cohors, so generous and velvety, or with the sparkling beverage of Anjou, so sweet and at the same time so treacherous that its fumes set the brain on fire before the last topaz-like drops in the glass are quaffed.

"The court is now completely full," said Antraguet, as rosy-cheeked as a young girl, and already as drunk as an old reiter, "as completely full as your highness's cellar."

"No, no," answered Ribeirac, "not so; we have no grand huntsman. It is, in truth, a shame that we should be eating your highness's dinner, and that we should have furnished no part of it ourselves."

"I vote we have some grand huntsman or other," said Livarot, "I don't care whom, even if it be M. de Monsoreau."

The duke smiled. He was the only one who knew of the count's arrival.

Livarot had hardly finished speaking and the prince smiling, when the door opened and M. de Monsoreau entered.

The duke, as soon as he perceived him, uttered an exclamation that was the more noticeable because a general silence had been the result of the grand huntsman's appearance.

"Well, here he is," said he; "you see we are specially favored by Heaven, gentlemen, since it has at once sent us what we asked for."

Monsoreau, rather put out by the prince's coolness,— a coolness not usual with him in such cases, — saluted, in an embarrassed way, and turned aside his head, as if he had been an owl suddenly transported from darkness into sunlight.

"Sit down and have your supper," said the duke, pointing to a seat in front of him.

"Monseigneur," answered Monsoreau, "I am very hungry, thirsty, and tired, but I will neither eat nor drink nor sit down until I have communicated to your highness a message of the highest importance."

"You come from Paris, do you not?"

"Yes, in great haste, monseigneur."

"Well, you may speak," said the duke.

Monsoreau approached François, with a smile on his lips and hate in his heart, and said, in a low tone:

"Monseigneur, the queen mother is advancing by long stages to pay a visit to your highness."

The duke, upon whom every eye was riveted, could not help looking delighted.

"It is well," he whispered, "thanks;" then, aloud: "I find you, M. de Monsoreau, to-day as always, a faithful servant. Let us go on with our supper, gentlemen."

And he drew his chair, which he had pushed back for a moment to hear M. de Monsoreau, to the table again.

The gayety of the banquet was restored; but the grand huntsman, who sat between Livarot and Ribeirac, as soon as he had the satisfaction of sitting in a comfortable chair, before a bounteous repast, suddenly lost all appetite.

The spirit resumed its sway over the flesh.

His mind, engrossed by sad thoughts, returned to the park of Méridor, and, making the same journey his exhausted body had just accomplished, again, like some watchful palmer, wandered along the flowery path that had conducted him to the wall.

He saw again the horse that neighed; he saw again the broken wall; he saw again the fleeing lovers; he heard again Diane's cry, the cry that echoed in his heart's recesses.

Then, indifferent to the noise and light and banquet, forgetful of the men beside him, forgetful of the man in front of him, he plunged into his own thoughts until his brow grew clouded and, unconsciously, he uttered a hollow groan, which at once drew to him the attention of the astonished guests.

"You are thoroughly tired out, M. le Comte," said the prince; "I think you had better go to bed."

"Faith, yes," said Livarot, "the advice is good, and, if you do not take it, you are pretty sure to fall asleep in your chair."

"Excuse me, monseigneur," answered Monsoreau, "but I am exceedingly fatigued."

"Get drunk, count," said Antraguet; "nothing brightens a fellow up like that."

"And then," murmured Monsoreau, "when you are drunk, you forget."

"Pshaw!" said Livarot; "you must be out of your senses. Look, gentlemen, he has not touched his glass!"

"Your health, count," said Ribeirac, raising his.

Monsoreau was forced to honor the gentleman's toast, and he drank off the contents of his glass without removing it from his lips.

"Why, he can drink like a Trojan," cried Antraguet. "Look, monseigneur."

"Yes," answered the prince, who was trying to read the count's heart. "Yes, he does it very well."

"You must get up a good hunt for us, count; you know the country," said Ribeirac.

"You have horses, hounds, and woods," added Livarot.

"And even a wife," continued Antraguet.

"Yes," repeated Monsoreau, mechanically, "horses, hounds, woods, and even Madame de Monsoreau. Yes, gentlemen, yes."

"Could you start a boar for us, count, do you think?" said the prince.

"I will try, monseigneur."

"Ah, upon my word, that 'I will try' is a nice kind of answer," said one of the Angevine gentlemen; "why, the woods are actually swarming with boars! If I cared to hunt near the old thicket, I could raise ten of them in less than five minutes."

Monsoreau turned pale, in spite of himself; the old thicket was the very part of the wood to which Roland had led him.

"Yes, yes," cried the gentlemen in chorus, "let us have a hunt to-morrow!"

"What do you say to to-morrow, Monsoreau?" asked the prince.

"I am always at your highness's orders," answered Monsoreau; "but, as monseigneur himself deigned to notice a moment ago, I am tired out, too much so to lead a hunt to-morrow. Besides, I must visit the neighborhood and examine the condition of our woods."

"And then, hang it! we must allow him to see his wife,

gentlemen," said the prince in a tone of jovial good nature that convinced the poor husband that François was his rival.

"We do! we do!" cried the young people, gayly. "We allow M. de Monsoreau twenty-four hours to do everything in his woods he has to do in them."

"Yes, gentlemen," said the count, "grant me these twenty-four hours, and I promise you I 'll employ them well."

"I permit you to retire now, M. le Comte," said the duke. "Let M. de Monsoreau be shown to his apartments."

M. de Monsoreau bowed himself out, relieved of that great burden, constraint.

Those who are in affliction are even fonder of solitude than are fortunate lovers.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW KING HENRI LEARNED OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER'S FLIGHT, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Once the grand huntsman was out of the hall, the gayety and joyousness of the banquet grew more unrestrained and hilarious than ever.

The count's gloomy face had produced a slightly sobering effect on the young gentlemen; for, beneath his weariness, partly affected but mostly real, they were able to get some slight glimpse of the utter joylessness of his soul and its absorption in the most dismal thoughts, thoughts that stamped his brow with the seal of a desperate sorrow and aggravated the repulsive characteristics of his physiognomy.

On his departure the prince, who was always embarrassed in his presence, resumed his air of tranquillity.

"Livarot," said he, "you were beginning to tell us of your escape from Paris when the grand huntsman entered. Continue."

And Livarot continued.

But as our title of historian gives us the privilege of knowing even better than Livarot what had taken place, we will substitute our narrative for that of the young man. The story will, perhaps, lose something in color, but it will gain in the perfection of its details, as we know what Livarot could not know, namely, all the events that occurred in the Louvre.

Toward the middle of the night, Henri III. was roused from his slumbers by an unusual uproar in his palace, in which, as soon as the King had retired, the most profound silence was enjoined.

There were oaths, blows of halberds on the walls, rapid running through the galleries, imprecations loud enough to raise the dead; and, amid all the crashing and banging and roaring and cursing, these words were heard, repeated by a thousand echoes:

"What will the King say? What will the King say?"

Henri sat up in bed and looked at Chicot, who, after supping with his Majesty, had fallen asleep in a large elbow-chair, his rapier between his legs.

The uproar grew louder.

Henri jumped out of bed, all plastered with his pomades.

"Chicot! Chicot!" he cried.

Chicot opened an eye; he was a sagacious wight, who had a strong appreciation of sleep and never quite awoke at the first call.

"You did wrong, Henri, to disturb me," said he. "I was dreaming you had a son."

"Listen!" whispered Henri; "listen!"

"Why should I listen? I should think you talk enough twaddle to me during the daytime, without wanting to encroach on my nights."

"But do you not hear?" said the King, pointing in the direction of the noise.

"Eh! By my faith, I do, really, hear cries."

"What will the King say? What will the King say?" repeated Henri. "Do you hear?"

"The hubbub is occasioned by one of two things: either your greyhound Narcisse is ill, or else the Huguenots are taking their revenge and having a Catholic Saint Bartholomew."

"Help me to dress, Chicot."

"I have no objection, but help me to rise, Henri."

"What a misfortune! What a misfortune!" was repeated in the antechambers.

"The devil 's in it, or this is something serious," said Chicot.

"It would be well for us to arm ourselves," said the King.

"It would be still better," answered Chicot, "to hurry through the little door and find out for ourselves what is the trouble, instead of waiting to be told about it by others."

In a few moments, Henri, acting on Chicot's advice, passed through the secret door and entered the corridor leading to the Duc d'Anjou's apartments.

There he saw hands lifted appealingly to heaven, and heard exclamations of the most despairing character.

"Oho!" exclaimed Chicot, "I have it! Your unhappy prisoner, Henri, has strangled himself in prison. *Ventre de biche*, man, I wish you joy with all my heart. You are a greater statesman than I had any idea you were."

"No! Silence, wretch! It cannot be as you say."

"So much the worse," answered Chicot.

"Come, come on."

And Henri dragged Chicot into the duke's bedchamber.

The window was open, and a crowd of inquisitive spectators trampled on one another's feet in the effort to get a view of the rope-ladder dangling from the iron knobs on the balcony.

Henri turned as pale as a sheet.

"Well, well, my son," said Chicot, "you are not so indifferent and cynical as I thought you were."

"Fled! Escaped!" cried Henri, in such a ringing voice that all the gentlemen at once turned round.

The King's eyes flashed; his hand clutched convulsively the hilt of his dagger.

Schomberg was tearing his hair; Quélus repeatedly struck his face with his fist, and with all his strength; and Maugiron butted his head like a ram against the partition.

As for D'Épernon, he had vanished, under the specious pretext of chasing M. d'Anjou.

The sight of the despair of his favorites and of the injury they were doing themselves restored the King's calmness in a moment.

"Compose yourself, my son," he said to Maugiron, placing his arm round his waist.

"No, *mordieu!* Devil take me if I don't break my neck on account of it!" And the young man made another attempt to dash out his brains, not against the partition, but against the wall.

"Hello, there!" cried Henri, "some one help me to restrain him."

"I say, comrade," said Chicot, "can you find no easier death than the one you're seeking? What prevents you from passing your sword neatly through your stomach, and so making an end of it."

"Hold your tongue, you murderer!" cried Henri, with tears in his eyes.

During this time, Quélus had managed to lacerate his cheeks in a frightful manner.

"Oh! Quélus, my child," said Henri, "do you want to look as ugly as Schomberg after he had been dipped in indigo? If you do, my dear boy, you will be frightful."

Quélus stopped.

Schomberg alone continued to tear his hair. He was weeping with rage.

"Schomberg! Schomberg! My dear Schomberg!" cried Henri, "be reasonable, I beseech you."

"It will drive me mad!"

"Bah!" said Chicot.

"In fact, it is a very great misfortune," said Henri, "and that is the very reason why you should try to keep in your sober senses, Schomberg. Yes, it is a frightful misfortune; I am ruined! There will be a civil war now in my kingdom. Ah! who has dealt me this blow? Who furnished the ladder? God's death! I'll have the whole city hanged, or I'll know!"

All who heard the King were thoroughly terrified.

"Who is the traitor? Where is he? Ten thousand crowns to him who tells me his name, a hundred thousand to the man that delivers him up, dead or alive."

"Who could it be except an Angevine?" cried Maugiron.

"By heavens! you are right," said Henri. "Ah! the Angevines, *mordieu!* the Angevines — Oh! they shall pay me for this!"

And as if this word had been a spark flung into a powder-magazine, a tremendous explosion of cries and threats broke out against the Angevines.

"Undoubtedly, the Angevines!" cried Quélus.

"Where are they?" howled Schomberg.

"Rip them open!" bawled Maugiron.

"A hundred gibbets for a hundred Angevines!" shouted the King.

Chicot could not remain silent in the midst of this general madness: drawing his rapier and flourishing it with the most exaggerated bravado, he laid about him in every direction, striking the minions with the flat of the sword, fencing at the wall, and all the time repeating:

"Oh, *ventre de biche!* oh, what manly rage! ah! damnation! death to the Angevines, I say! death to the Angevines!"

This cry: "Death to the Angevines! was heard throughout the city, as the cry of the Hebrew mothers was once heard throughout all Rama.

Meanwhile Henri was no longer in the room.

The thought suddenly occurred to him that it would be a wise idea to visit his mother, who had been somewhat neglected of late, and, slipping quietly out of the room, he directed his steps to her apartments.

Under an appearance of detachment from the world, Catharine was really waiting for the time when her policy, as she saw with her Florentine penetration, would be again in the ascendant.

When Henri entered, she was reclining in a large armchair, evidently in a pensive mood; with her fat and somewhat yellowish cheeks, with the fixed stare in her brilliant eyes, and with her plump but pale hands, she bore a stronger resemblance to a waxen statue of Meditation than she did to a living, animated human being.

But at the news of the escape of François, news which Henri announced with the utmost bluntness, for he was on fire with anger and hatred, the statue seemed suddenly to awake to life, although the movement that told of this awaking consisted in leaning farther back in her chair and in a silent shake of the head.

"Mother," said Henri, "you do not express any indignation!"

"Why should I do so, my son?" asked Catharine.

"What! your son's escape does not strike you as criminal, dangerous, and deserving of the severest punishment?"

"My dear son, liberty is well worth a crown; and remember, I advised you to fly in order to gain a crown."

"Mother, he outrages me."

Catharine shrugged her shoulders.

"Mother, he braves me."

"Oh, no," answered Catharine; "he escapes; that is all."

"Ah!" he rejoined, "this is how you take my part."

"What do you mean, my son?"

"I mean that the feelings are deadened by age; I mean that" —

He paused.

"What are you saying?" asked Catharine, with her customary serenity.

"That you no longer love me as you once did."

"You are mistaken," said Catharine, with increasing coldness. "You are my best-beloved son, Henri. But he of whom you complain is also my son."

"Ah! I do not want any of your commonplaces of maternal morality, madame," said Henri, furiously; "we all know what they are worth."

"Indeed! Certainly you ought to know better than any one; for my maternal morality has always changed to weakness where you were concerned."

"And, as your present leanings are in the direction of repentance, you repent of that, too."

"I saw clearly, my son," said she, "that we must come to this in the end. That was the reason why I kept silent."

"Adieu, madame, adieu," answered Henri. "I know now what I have to do since my mother no longer sympathizes with me. I can find other counsellors, however, who will befriend me in my just indignation and advise me in this critical juncture."

"Go, my son," said the Florentine, calmly, "and may your counsellors have the guidance of God! they will certainly need it if they are going to be any help to you in your present difficulties."

And she did not make a gesture or utter a word to detain him.

"Adieu, madame," repeated Henri.

But when near the door he paused.

"Adieu, Henri," said the queen. "But one word more. I do not presume to advise you, my son; I am fully aware you do not require my support; but entreat your counsellors to reflect well before coming to any decision, and to reflect more deeply still before carrying that decision into effect."

"Yes, yes," said Henri, making his mother's last words an excuse for not advancing further, "for the position is a difficult one, is it not, madame?"

"Yes; it is grave," said Catharine, slowly raising her eyes and hands to heaven; "very grave indeed, my son."

The King, impressed by the terror he thought he read in his mother's eyes, came up close to her.

"Have you any idea, mother," he asked, "who it was that carried him off?"

Catharine did not reply.

"I believe," said Henri, "it was the Angevines."

Catharine smiled, with that air of feline astuteness which was in her the index of a superior mind ever on the watch to confuse and overawe the minds of others.

"The Angevines?" she repeated.

"You do not believe it," said Henri; "and yet everybody believes it."

Catharine simply shrugged her shoulders.

"As for what others believe, it does not matter; but what do you believe, my son?"

"Nay, madame, — what do you mean? Explain yourself, I beseech you."

"What good will an explanation do?"

"It will enlighten me."

"Enlighten you! Nonsense, Henri, I am but a doting old woman; my only influence lies in my prayers and repentance."

"No, speak, speak, mother, I am eager to hear you. You are still, and must be ever, the very soul of us all."

"It would be useless; my ideas are the ideas of another age, and self-distrust warps the intelligence of the old. Can old Catharine, at her time of life, offer any advice that is worth listening to? Nonsense, my son, that is impossible."

"Be it so, then, mother," said Henri; "you may refuse me your support, you may deprive me of your aid, but in an hour, whatever may be your opinion, — I shall possibly learn it then, — I will have all the Angevines in Paris hanged."

"Have the Angevines hanged!" cried Catharine, amazed, as are all superior minds when they hear for the first time of some act that is enormously stupid as well as enormously wicked.

"Yes; hanged, massacred, butchered, burned. At this very moment my friends are running through the city to break the bones of these accursed rebels and bandits!"

"Let them take good care not to do any such thing, the wretches!" cried Catharine, aroused by the serious nature of the situation. "They would ruin themselves, which is nothing; but they would ruin you also."

"How?"

"Oh, blind! blind!" murmured Catharine. "Will kings eternally have eyes, and see not?"

And she wrung her hands.

"Kings are kings only as long as they avenge the wrongs that are done them, and in the present case my whole realm will rise up to defend me."

"Fool, madman, child," murmured the Florentine.

"Why, and how?"

"Think you you can hang, and butcher, and burn men like Bussy, and Antraguet, and Ribeirac, and Livarot without causing oceans of blood to flow?"

"What matter, provided they are killed?"

"Oh, yes, yes, provided they are killed; show me their dead bodies, and, by our Lady, I will tell you you have done well! But you will not kill them; you will, on the contrary, supply them with a reason for raising the standard of revolt; you will, with your own hand, place in theirs the naked sword they would of themselves have never dared to unsheathe for such a master as François. Your imprudence gives them their opportunity. They will draw it to defend their lives, and your kingdom will rise, not for you, but against you."

"But if I do not avenge my wrongs, I show fear, I seem to recoil," cried Henri.

"Has any one ever said that I showed fear?" said Catharine, pressing her teeth on her thin, carmine-tinged lips.

"But, if it was the Angevines, they deserve punishment, mother."

"Yes, if it was they; but it was not."

"Who could it be, if not my brother's friends?"

"It was not your brother's friends, for your brother has no friends."

"Then who was it?"

"Your enemies, or, rather, your enemy."

"What enemy?"

"Ah, my son, you know well that you have never had but one, just as your brother Charles never had but one, and just as I have never had but one, — one who is ever the same persistent foe."

"Do you mean Henri de Navarre?"

"Yes, Henri de Navarre."

"He is not in Paris!"

"Ah! do you know who is in Paris or who is not? Do you know anything? Have you eyes and ears? Do the people around you see and hear? No, you are all deaf, you are all blind."

"Henri de Navarre!" repeated the King.

"My son, whenever disappointment is your portion, whenever misfortune is your lot, whenever a catastrophe whose author is unknown to you befalls you, do not search, or conjecture, or inquire, — it is useless. Cry aloud: 'Henri de Navarre!' and you will be sure you are speaking the truth. Strike in the quarter where he stands, and you will be sure to strike right. Oh! that man! that man! He is the sword of God suspended above the house of Valois!"

"You are of opinion, then, that I should countermand my orders in respect to the Angevines?"

"At once," cried Catharine, "do not lose a minute, do not lose a second. Hasten, it may be already too late; run and revoke your orders; begone, or you are lost."

And seizing her son by the arm she hurried him to the door with a strength and energy that were amazing in a woman of her age.

Henri rushed out of the Louvre in search of his friends.

But he found only Chicot, sitting on a stone and tracing geographical outlines on the sand.

PART III.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HOW CHICOT AGREED WITH THE QUEEN MOTHER, AND HOW THE KING AGREED WITH BOTH.

Henri approached and saw that it was, indeed, the Gascon, who, quite as absorbed in his work as was Archimedes once upon a time, seemed determined not to raise his head. though Paris were taken by storm.

"Ha! knave," cried Henri, in a voice of thunder, "this is the way, then, you defend your King?"

"Yes, I defend him in my own way, and I think it is a good way."

"A good way!" exclaimed Henri, "a good way, you laggard!"

"I maintain and will prove it."

"I am curious to have your proof."

"It is easy to do so: in the first place, we have committed a great folly, my worthy King, an enormous folly."

"By doing what?"

"By doing what we have done."

"Ah!" murmured Henri, struck by the harmony between the opinions of two supremely astute minds that had reached the same result and yet had never come in contact.

"Yes," answered Chicot, "by getting our friends to howl: 'Death to the Angevines!' through the city. And, now that I have reflected, I am unable to see that the Angevines had anything to do with the business. Your friends, I repeat, by crying through the city 'Death to the Angevines!' are simply starting that little civil war which the Guises could not start, but of which they stand in great need. And now, look you, Henri, one of two things has happened: either your friends have come to an untimely end, which would not grieve me

greatly, I confess, but which would sadden you excessively, I know; or they have chased the Angevines out of the city, which would be a great misfortune for you, but, on the other hand, would give boundless satisfaction to that dear friend of ours, Anjou."

"*Mordieu!*" cried the King, "do you believe things have gone as far as you say?"

"Yes, if they have not gone farther."

"But all this does not explain what you are doing on that stone."

"I am engaged on a very urgent task, my son."

"What is it?"

"I am tracing a plan of all the provinces your brother will raise against us, and I am reckoning up the number of men each will contribute to the revolt."

"Chicot! Chicot," cried the King, "am I to have none about me but birds of ill-omen!"

"The owl hoots by night, my son," answered Chicot, "for it is his hour for hooting. Now this is a gloomy time, my Harry, so gloomy that, in truth, there is very little difference between night and day, and so I indulge in a little hooting that it might be well for you to listen to. Look!"

"Look at what?"

"Look at my map, and judge. Here is Anjou; is n't it like a little tart? Do you see? it 's the spot to which your brother has fled; so I have given it the place of honor. Hum! Anjou, well handled, well worked, as your friend Bussy and your grand huntsman Monsoreau will handle and work it, Anjou, I say, can furnish us — and, when I say 'us,' I mean your brother — Anjou can furnish your brother with ten thousand soldiers."

"You think so?"

"It 's the minimum. Let us pass on to Guienne; you see it, don't you? that figure like a calf limping on one leg. Ah, faith, you need n't be astonished to find a good many discontented people in that same Guienne! It is an old focus of revolt; why, the English can hardly be said to be yet out of it. Guienne, then, will be tickled to death at the chances of rising, not against you, but against France. We may put down Guienne for eight thousand fighters. It is n't much; but don't be uneasy, they are inured to war and masters of their trade. Next, here on the left, don't you see them? We

have Béarn and Navarre, two divisions that have some resemblance to a monkey on the back of an elephant. Navarre, I know, has been a good deal mutilated, but, with Béarn, it has still a population of three or four hundred thousand men. Suppose, now, that Béarn and Navarre, which have been very much squeezed and battered and shattered by my Harry, should furnish five per cent. of their population, or sixteen thousand men to the League — Let us count up: ten thousand for Anjou" —

And Chicot began tracing figures on the sand with his switch —

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	10,000
Eight thousand for Guienne - - - - - - - - - -	8,000
Sixteen thousand for Béarn and Navarre - - - - -	16,000
Total - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	34,000

"You think, then, the King of Navarre will form an alliance with my brother?" said Henri.

"Well, I should say so!"

"You think, then, he had something to do with my brother's escape?"

Chicot stared at the King.

"Harry," said he, "that is not your own idea."

"Why not?"

"Because it is too sensible, my son."

"No matter whose idea it is; I am questioning you, it is for you to answer. Do you think that Henri de Navarre had anything to do with the escape of my brother?"

"Hum! I remember hearing somewhere in the Rue de la Ferronnerie a '*ventre saint-gris*,' and, now that I recall it, that seems to me to be rather conclusive."

"You heard a '*ventre saint-gris*'!" cried the King.

"Faith, yes," answered Chicot, "I only called it to mind to-day."

"He was in Paris, then?"

"I believe so."

"And what makes you believe so?"

"My eyes."

"You saw Henri de Navarre?"

"Yes."

"And you never told me that my enemy had dared to come and brave me even in my capital?"

"A man is a gentleman or he is n't," answered Chicot.

"What follows?"

"Well, if a man is a gentleman, he is n't a spy; does n't that follow?"

Henri became thoughtful.

"So," said he, "Anjou and Béarn! My brother François and my cousin Henri!"

"And, of course, without reckoning the three Guises."

"What! Do you suppose they will all make an alliance together?"

"Thirty-four thousand men in one quarter," said Chicot, counting on his fingers: ten thousand for Anjou, eight thousand for Guienne, sixteen thousand for Béarn, plus twenty or twenty-five thousand under the orders of M. de Guise, as lieutenant-general of your armies; sum total, fifty-nine thousand men. Suppose we reduce it to fifty thousand, on account of gout, rheumatism, sciatica, and other diseases, we have still you see, my son, a very pretty sum total."

"But Henri de Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies?'

"Which will not prevent them from combining against you: they can exterminate each other when they have exterminated you."

"You are right, Chicot, my mother is right, you are both right; we must prevent an outbreak; help me to get the Swiss together."

"Eh? The Swiss, is it? Quélus took them with him."

"My guards, then."

"They 're gone with Schomberg."

"The men of my household, at least."

"Are off with Maugiron."

"What!" cried Henri, "without my orders!"

"And pray, since when, Henri, have you begun giving orders? Oh, yes, when it is a question of processions and flagellations you are ready enough with your orders, I admit. You are then allowed to do as you like with your own skin and even with the skins of others. But when it is a question of war, when it is a question of government!— oh, that is for M. de Schomberg, and M. de Quélus, and M. de Maugiron. As for D'Épernon, he don't count, since he is in hiding."

"*Mordieu!*" cried Henri; "so that is the way things are going on!"

"Permit me, my son, to observe that it is rather late in the day for you to discover you are only the seventh or eighth king in your kingdom."

Henri bit his lips and stamped on the ground.

"Ah!" exclaimed Chicot, peering into the darkness.

"What is the matter?" inquired the King.

"*Ventre de biche!* there they are, Henri; yonder are your friends."

And he pointed to three or four cavaliers riding toward them and followed at a distance by some other men on horseback, and a large number on foot.

The cavaliers were just about to enter the Louvre, never noticing the two men standing near the fosse and, indeed, almost invisible in the darkness.

"Schomberg!" cried the King; "this way, Schomberg!"

"Hullo!" said Schomberg; "who calls me?"

"Come here, my child, come here!"

Schomberg thought he knew the voice and approached.

"Why," he exclaimed, "God damn me if it is not the King!"

"Yes, myself; I was going after you, but did not know where you were; I have been waiting for you impatiently what have you been doing?"

"What have we been doing?" said a second cavalier, drawing near.

"Ah, come here, Quélus, you, too," said the King, "and never again set out in this fashion without my permission."

"It is no longer necessary," said a third, whom the King recognized to be Maugiron, "for all is over."

"All is over?" repeated the King.

"God be praised!" cried D'Épernon, suddenly appearing, without any one knowing where he sprang from.

"Hosanna!" cried Chicot, raising his hands to heaven.

"Then you have killed them?" said the King.

And he whispered to himself:

"When all is said and done, the dead never return."

"You have killed them?" asked Chicot; "ah! if you killed them, there is nothing more to be said!"

"We did not have that trouble," answered Schomberg; "the cowards fled like a flock of pigeons; we have hardly been able to cross swords with them."

Henri turned pale.

"And with whom did you cross swords?" he asked.

"With Antraguet."

"You gave him his quietus, anyway."

"Quite the contrary — he killed one of Quélus's lackeys."

"They were on their guard, then?"

"Faith, I should think they were!" cried Chicot. "You howl: 'Death to the Angevines!' you fire off your cannon and ring your bells and set all the old pots and pans in Paris quivering, and yet you fancy that these honest fellows must be as deaf as you are stupid."

"And now, now," murmured the King, in a hollow voice, "we have a civil war on our hands."

The words made Quélus start.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; "it is true."

"Ah!" said Chicot; "you are beginning to perceive it, are you? That is fortunate. Here are Schomberg and Maugiron, who have not the slightest suspicion of it, so far."

"We can think of nothing," answered Schomberg, "except of our duty to defend his Majesty's person and crown."

"Oh, indeed!" said Chicot; "still, M. de Clisson has something to do in that line; he does n't shout so loud, but he will acquit himself of his task at least as well as you."

"But, M. Chicot," said Quélus, "although you are always pitching into us, in season and out of season, you thought just as we did two hours ago, or, at any rate, if you did n't think like us, you shouted like us."

"I?" said Chicot.

"Yes, and you even fenced at the wall, crying: 'Death to the Angevines!'"

"Oh, it is quite a different matter where I am concerned; every one knows I am a fool; but for men of your high intelligence to" —

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Henri, "peace; we 'll soon have quite enough of war."

"What are your Majesty's orders?" said Quélus.

"That you show the same zeal in calming the people that you have in stirring them up. Lead back the Swiss, the guards, and the people of my household to the Louvre, and have the gates shut. I should wish the Parisians to-morrow to look on the whole thing as a mere drunken frolic."

The young gentlemen went away, looking rather foolish, and

passed the King's orders to the officers who had accompanied them during their escapade.

As for Henri, he returned to his mother, who, though gloomy and dispirited, was very busy giving orders to her people.

"Well," said she, "what has happened?"

"Just what you had predicted, mother."

"They have fled?"

"Alas! yes."

"Ah!" said she; "and what next?"

"Nothing; I think what did occur was quite enough."

"The city?"

"Is in a tumult; but the city does not trouble me — I have the city under my thumb."

"I know," said Catharine; "then it is the provinces."

"Which will revolt, rise in rebellion," continued Henri.

"What do you intend doing?"

"I see but one way of acting."

"What is it?

"To accept the situation frankly."

"In what manner?"

"I intend to give my orders to my colonels and guards, arm the militia, withdraw the army from La Charité, and march on Anjou."

"And what about M. de Guise?"

"M. de Guise? Oh, I'll arrest him, if necessary."

"Ah, yes, it would be all very well if these violent measures could succeed."

"But what else can I do?"

Catharine dropped her head on her breast and reflected for a moment.

"The plan you have mentioned is impracticable, my son," said she.

"Ah!" cried Henri, fretfully; "it would seem as if nothing I think of to-day has any value."

"No, but you are agitated; try to regain your composure, and we will see."

"Then, mother, invent ideas for me; we must do something, we must act."

"You can see for yourself, my son, that I was giving orders."

"For what?"

"For the departure of an ambassador."

"To whom are we sending him?"

"To your brother."

"An ambassador to that traitor! You degrade me, mother."

"This is not the moment to be proud," said Catharine, sternly.

"An ambassador to ask for peace?"

"To buy it, if need be."

"For what advantages in return?"

"What, my son!" answered the Florentine; "why, after the peace has been concluded, you can secure quietly the persons of those who have made war on you. Have you not just said you should like to have them in your power?"

"Oh! I would give four provinces of my kingdom for that, a province for every man."

"Then, to secure the end you must employ the means," answered Catharine, in thrilling tones that aroused all the feelings of hatred and vengeance in Henri's heart.

"I believe you are right, mother," said he; "but whom shall we send?"

"Search among your friends."

"Useless, mother; I do not know a single man to whom I could entrust such a mission."

"Entrust it to a woman, then."

"To a woman, mother! Would you consent?"

"My son, I am very old and very weary, and death, perhaps, will await me on my return hither; but I will make this journey so quickly that I shall be at Angers before your brother and your brother's friends have had time to realize their power."

"O mother! kind, good mother!" cried Henri, kissing her hands passionately, "you are always my support, my good genius, and my savior!"

"Which means I am always Queen of France," murmured Catharine, regarding her son with eyes in which there was, at least, as much pity as tenderness.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GRATITUDE WAS ONE OF SAINT-LUC'S VIRTUES.

THE morning after the night when M. de Monsoreau had made such a pitiable appearance at the Duc d'Anjou's supper that he was allowed to retire before the end, the count rose very early and descended into the courtyard of the palace.

He had decided on interviewing the groom whom he had met before, and, if it were possible, extracting from him some information as to the habits of Roland.

He entered a large outhouse where forty magnificent steeds were munching contentedly the straw and oats of Anjou.

His first glance was for Roland.

Roland was in his stall and enjoying the bounteous repast before him to his heart's content.

His second glance was for the groom.

The groom was standing, with folded arms, giving all his attention, as an honest groom should do, to the more or less greedy fashion in which his master's horses were swallowing their customary provender.

"I say, my good fellow," said the count, "would you tell me if it is the habit of the horses of his highness to return to the stables of their own accord, and if they are trained to do so?"

"No, M. le Comte," answered the groom. "Has your question reference to any particular horse?"

"Yes, to Roland."

"Ah, now I remember, Roland did return alone yesterday; but that does not surprise me in the least, he is a very intelligent beast."

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I saw that myself; did he ever do so before?"

"No, monsieur," answered the groom. "The Duc d'Anjou rides him usually. The duke is a fine horseman and not easily thrown."

"I was not thrown off, my friend," said the count, annoyed that any man, and especially a groom, should believe he could be unhorsed, he, the grand huntsman of France! "Although I may not be as perfect a cavalier as the Duc d'Anjou, I have

a pretty good seat in the saddle. No, I tied him to a tree near a house I wished to enter. On my return, he had disappeared. I imagined that he must have been stolen, or that some gentleman, happening to pass that way, had played a stupid trick on me by taking my horse to the city with him. That is the reason why I asked you who had led him to the stable."

"He came back alone, as the major-domo had the honor of telling you yesterday, M. le Comte."

"It is strange," said Monsoreau.

He remained in deep thought for a moment; then, changing the conversation:

"Does his highness ride this horse often?" said he.

"He used to ride him almost every day before his stud arrived."

"Did his highness return late yesterday evening?"

"About an hour before yourself, M. le Comte."

"And what horse did he ride? Was it not a bay with white feet, and a star on the forehead?"

"No, monsieur; yesterday his highness rode Isolin," answered the groom; "the one yonder."

"And was there no gentleman in the prince's suite mounted on a horse like the one I have described?"

"I do not know any one who has such a horse."

"That will do," said Monsoreau, impatient at succeeding so badly in his investigations; "that will do, thanks. Saddle me Roland."

"You want Roland, M. le Comte?"

"Yes. Has the prince ordered you not to give him to me?"

"No, monsieur; on the contrary, his highness' equerry has ordered me to place the entire stable at your disposal."

How be angry with a prince who was so exceedingly courteous?

M. de Monsoreau made a sign to the groom, who at once set about saddling the horse.

When this task was accomplished he led Roland to the count.

"Listen," said Monsoreau, taking the reins in his hands, "and answer me."

"With the greatest pleasure, M. le Comte," replied the groom.

"How much do you earn a year?"

"Twenty crowns, monsieur."

"Would you like to earn ten years' wages at one stroke?"

"Should n't I, though!" said the groom. "But how am I to do it?"

"Find out who rode yesterday the bay with the white feet and the star on the forehead."

"Ah, monsieur," answered the groom, "it will be very hard for me to do that! There are so many noblemen constantly paying visits to his highness."

"Yes; but two hundred crowns make a rather neat little sum, and it ought to be worth while going to some trouble to get hold of them."

"Undoubtedly, M. le Comte; and so, I am not refusing your offer; far from it."

"Very good," said the count. "I am pleased with your readiness. Here are ten crowns, to encourage you; you see, whatever happens, you don't lose anything."

"Thanks, M. le Comte."

"And now you will tell the prince I have gone to inspect the wood and to have everything ready for the hunt he has ordered for to-morrow."

As he finished speaking, the straw behind him crackled under the footsteps of another visitor.

The count turned round.

"M. de Bussy!" he exclaimed.

"Eh! it is you, M. de Monsoreau?" said Bussy; "good morning; I am quite surprised to meet you at Angers."

"And I am equally surprised to meet you, monsieur; I was told you were ill."

"And you were correctly informed," answered Bussy; "my doctor orders absolute rest, and I have not been outside the city during the past week. Ah, you are, it appears, going to ride Roland, are you? I sold the beast to M. d'Anjou, and he is so proud of him that he rides him almost every day."

Monsoreau turned pale.

"Yes," said he, "I can easily understand that; Roland is a first-rate animal."

"It was a lucky chance for you to hit on that horse for your ride to-day."

"Oh, Roland and I are old acquaintances," replied the count, "I rode him yesterday."

"And you liked him so well that you are going to mount him again to-day?"

"Yes," said the count.

"Excuse me," resumed Bussy, "I think I heard you speaking of getting up a hunt for us?"

"The prince desires to course a stag."

"Is it true, as I have heard, that there are many in the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"And where do you intend starting the animal?"

"Near Méridor."

It was now Bussy's turn to change color, which he did, in spite of himself.

"Will you be one of the party?" asked Monsoreau.

"No, a thousand thanks," answered Bussy, "I shall go to bed now; I have become feverish again."

"Well, upon my word!" cried a voice from the threshold of the stable; "this is a nice state of things! M. de Bussy out of bed without my permission!"

"Le Haudouin!" exclaimed Bussy; "good, now I'm in for a scolding. Good-by, count; take care of Roland."

"You may rest easy on that point."

Bussy withdrew, and M. de Monsoreau leaped into the saddle.

"What ails you?" inquired Le Haudouin; "you are so pale that I am almost inclined to believe you are ill myself."

"Do you know where he is going?" said Bussy.

"No."

"To Méridor."

"Well, did you expect him to keep away from it?"

"Great God! what will happen, after what he saw yesterday?"

"Madame de Monsoreau will deny everything."

"But he saw her."

"She will insist he must have been purblind at the time."

"Diane will never have the strength to do that."

"Oh, M. de Bussy, is it possible that you are so ignorant of women?"

"Rémy, I feel very ill."

"I can see you are. Go home, and be sure you take my prescription for this morning."

"What is it?"

"Some stewed chicken, a slice of ham, and a bisk of crawfish."

"Oh, I 'm not hungry."

"The more reason why you should obey my orders and eat."

"Rémy, I have a presentiment that this ruffian will create a terrible scene at Méridor. I see now I should have accepted his invitation and gone with him when he asked me."

"For what purpose?"

"To support Diane."

"Diane, I tell you, can support herself; I said so before, and I repeat it; and, as you must do something to support yourself also, come along with me at once. Besides, you know well you ought not to let people see you up. Why did you quit your room without my leave?"

"I was so uneasy I could n't stay in."

Rémy shrugged his shoulders, carried off Bussy, and saw to it that he was seated before a well-supplied table behind closed doors, while M. de Monsoreau passed out of Angers by the same gate as on the previous evening.

The count had had his own reasons for requesting to be allowed to ride Roland again: he wanted to make sure whether it was chance or habit that had guided this animal, so universally praised for his intelligence, to the park wall.

As soon as Monsoreau was outside the palace grounds he dropped the reins on the horse's neck.

Roland did exactly what his rider expected him to do.

As soon as he was beyond the gate he turned to the left. M. de Monsoreau gave him full liberty to do so. After a time he swerved to the right; M. de Monsoreau did not interfere with him this time either.

Horse and rider soon found themselves in the charming flowery path already mentioned, then near the thicket and among the giant trees.

Just as had happened on the evening before, Roland's trot quickened as they approached Méridor, and speedily changed into a gallop. At the end of forty or fifty minutes the count was in sight of the wall — in sight of that part of it with which he was already acquainted.

But the place was now solitary and silent; no neigh heard; no horse was seen, either tied to a tree or wandering at liberty.

M. de Monsoreau alighted; but, to make sure that he should not have to return on foot to Angers this time, he held the reins while he climbed the wall.

The park was as quiet and lonely within the enclosure as without. The long avenues were unrolled before his eyes, until they were lost in the distance, and a few bounding roebucks alone gave a touch of life to the deserted turf of the vast greenswards.

The count concluded it was useless to waste his time in watching for people who were on their guard, and who, alarmed at his appearance on the previous evening, had either postponed their meetings or selected another place for them. He mounted again, turned into a little side path, and, after a quarter of an hour, during which he had to keep a tight rein over Roland, he reached the portcullis.

The baron, to keep his dogs up to the mark, was giving them a touch of the lash at the time the count was passing over the drawbridge.

As soon as he saw his son-in-law he advanced ceremoniously to meet him.

Diane, seated under a magnificent sycamore, was reading the poems of Marot. Gertrude, her faithful attendant, was embroidering by her side.

The count, after saluting the baron, perceived the two women.

He jumped from his horse and approached them.

Diane rose, advanced three steps to meet the count, and made him a grave courtesy.

"What coolness! or, rather, what perfidy!" murmured the count. "What a tempest I shall raise on the bosom of those stagnant waters!"

A lackey came up. The grand huntsman threw him the reins, and turned to Diane.

"Madame," said he, "may I speak with you privately for a few moments?"

"Of course, monsieur," answered Diane.

"Do you intend doing us the honor of staying at the castle, M. le Comte?" inquired the baron.

"Yes, monsieur; at least until to-morrow"

The baron withdrew to inspect the chamber of his son-in-law and see that all the laws of hospitality were observed in his regard.

Monsoreau motioned Diane to the chair in which she had been sitting; he himself sat down on that of Gertrude, at the same time bending a look on his wife that would have intimidated the most resolute man.

"Madame," said he, "who was with you in the park yesterday evening?"

Diane gazed at her husband with pure and limpid eyes.

"At what hour, monsieur?" she asked, in tones from which the power of her will had succeeded in banishing all emotion.

"At six."

"In what place?"

"Near the old thicket."

"It must have been one of my friends who took a walk in that direction; certainly it was not I."

"It was you, madame," said Monsoreau.

"Why, how can you know?"

For a moment Monsoreau was struck dumb, and could not utter a word in reply, but his anger soon got the better of his stupefaction.

"Tell me the name of this man," said he.

"Of what man?"

"The man who was walking with you."

"How can I tell you when I was not out walking at the time?"

"It was you, I tell you," cried Monsoreau, stamping on the ground.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," replied Diane, coldly.

"Why do you dare to deny it when I saw you?"

"Saw me yourself, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame; saw you myself. Why, then, do you dare to deny it was you, since you are the only woman staying at Méridor?"

"There, again, you are mistaken, monsieur; Jeanne de Brissac is here."

"Madame de Saint-Luc?"

"Yes, Madame de Saint-Luc, who is my friend."

"And M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Never leaves his wife, as you know; theirs was a marriage of love; it was M. de Saint-Luc and Madame de Saint-Luc you saw."

"It was not M. de Saint-Luc; it was not Madame de Saint-Luc. It was you, whom I recognized perfectly, with a man whom I do not know, but whom I will know, I swear to you."

"Do you persist in saying it was I, monsieur?"

"Why, I tell you I recognized you; I tell you I heard the cry you uttered."

"When you have recovered your senses, monsieur, I shall be ready to listen to you; at present, I think I had better retire."

"No, madame," exclaimed Monsoreau, holding Diane by the arm, "you shall remain!"

"Monsieur," said Diane, "M. and Madame de Saint-Luc are coming toward us. I hope you will show a little self-restraint in their presence."

Diane was right. Saint-Luc and his wife had just come into view at the end of an alley, evidently summoned by the dinner-bell, which was now set a-going again, as if to inform Monsoreau that he was the only loiterer.

Both recognized the count, and, guessing that their presence was likely to relieve Diane from great embarrassment, they advanced quickly.

Madame de Saint-Luc made a sweeping reverence to M. de Monsoreau.

Saint-Luc offered his hand cordially.

After the usual compliments, Saint-Luc handed his wife to Monsoreau and took Diane's arm himself.

Dinner always began at nine in the manor of Méridor; it was an old custom, dating from the times of good King Louis XII., which the baron observed in all its integrity.

M. de Monsoreau found that the seat assigned him was between Saint-Luc and his wife.

Diane, separated from her husband by her friend's skilful manœuvring, sat between Saint-Luc and the baron.

The conversation was general: it naturally turned on the arrival of the King's brother at Angers and the condition of affairs his arrival was likely to create in the province.

Monsoreau tried to lead it to other subjects; but the others showed such a decided disinclination to follow him that he had to give up the attempt in despair.

It was not that Saint-Luc refused to answer his questions, quite the contrary; he courted and flattered the furious husband in the most charming manner imaginable, and Diane, who, owing to Saint-Luc's prattle, was able to remain silent, thanked him with many an eloquent look.

"This Saint-Luc is an idiot," said the count to himself, "and chatters like a magpie; he 's the very man to let out the secret I want to know; I 'll tear it from him some way or other."

M. de Monsoreau did not know Saint-Luc, having come to court only just at the moment when the latter was leaving it.

So, having this idea of the young man, he answered him with a politeness that gave great pleasure to Diane and contributed to the general comfort of the baron's guests.

Moreover, Madame de Monsoreau could read a look in Saint-Luc's eyes that said plainly:

"Do not be uneasy, madame, for I am devising a plan."

What Saint-Luc's plan was we shall learn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LXV.

SAINT-LUC'S PLAN.

When dinner was over, Monsoreau took his new friend's arm and passed with him out of the castle.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to find you here," said he; "the loneliness of Méridor positively frightened me."

"Oh, that cannot be," answered Saint-Luc. "Have you not your wife? With such a companion I fancy I should not find a desert lonely."

"I do not say that you may not be right," said Monsoreau, biting his lips. "Still" —

"Still what?"

"Still, I am very glad to have met you here."

"Monsieur," said Saint-Luc, all the time using a little gold tooth-pick, "it is your politeness makes you say so; I will not believe that you can ever be bored in the company of such a wife and living in such a beautiful country."

"Bah!" answered Monsoreau, "I have spent half my life in the woods."

"The more reason, then, why they should not bore you. In my opinion, the more familiar you are with these woods, the more you must love them. I shall feel very badly myself, I can tell you, when I am forced to leave them, and, unfortunately, I fear I shall have to do so before long."

"Why should you leave them?"

"Oh, monsieur, is man ever the master of his fate? He is like a leaf that is parted from the tree and blown about by the

wind over valley and plain, unconscious whither it is going. But you must be very happy."

"Happy on account of what?"

"Dwelling beneath these magnificent elms."

"Oh, I fancy I shall not dwell beneath them very long, either."

"Nonsense! you cannot be serious. What do you mean?"

"Well, I am not such a passionate lover of nature as you are, and, I confess, I have my misgivings about this park you admire so greatly."

"Misgivings about the park, you say! And for what reason?"

"I do not think it safe."

"Not safe! You surprise me!" and Saint-Luc did look really astonished. "Is it because it is so isolated?"

"No, not on account of that exactly; for I presume you see a good deal of company at Méridor."

"Faith, we don't," replied Saint-Luc, in his most artless manner, "not a soul."

"You amaze me!"

"I give you my word of honor that what I say is perfectly true."

"What! do you never receive any visitors?"

"There have been none here since I came, at least."

"And has not a single gentleman from that fine court of ours at Angers ever found his way here?"

"Not one."

"That is impossible!"

"Maybe, but it is true."

"Oh, for shame! You are calumniating our Angevine gentlemen."

"I don't know whether I'm calumniating them or not. But devil take me if I have caught a glimpse of one of their plumes all the time that I have been in this neighborhood."

"Then I am wrong on that point."

"Oh, entirely wrong. But let us come back to what you were just saying about the park not being safe. Are there any bears around?"

"Oh, no."

"Wolves?"

"None either."

"Robbers?"

"Perhaps. By the way, my dear friend, you have a very beautiful wife, have you not?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Does Madame de Saint-Luc walk often in the park?"

"Very often; like myself, she is very fond of the country. But why do you ask me such a question?"

"Oh, I had no particular reason. I suppose you are with her when she walks?"

"Always," said Saint-Luc.

"You mean *almost* always," continued the count.

"But what the devil are you driving at?"

"Good heavens! my dear Saint-Luc, at nothing, or, at least, at next to nothing."

"I listen."

"Well, I have been told" —

"What have you been told? Go on."

"You will not be angry?"

"I am never angry."

"Besides, between husbands these confidences are admissible; I have been told that a man was seen prowling in the park."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Coming after my wife?"

"Oh, I do not say that."

"You would be entirely in the wrong if you did not say it, my dear M. de Monsoreau; such information must certainly have the greatest interest for me — and who saw him, if you please?"

"What is the good of saying more?"

"Oh, say everything. We came out for a talk, did we not? Well, we may as well talk about this as anything else. You say this man was after Madame de Saint-Luc. Oho! — egad, that looks serious!"

"Listen, I may as well make a clean breast of it; no, I do not believe he was looking for Madame de Saint-Luc."

"And for whom, pray?"

"I am afraid it was for Diane."

"Ah," cried Saint-Luc, "that pleases me much better."

"Why should it please you better?"

"Why should n't it? You know we husbands are the most selfish race in the world: Every man for himself and God for us all!"

"Or rather the devil!" added Monsoreau.

"Then you really believe a man got into the park?"

"I saw him; seeing is believing."

"You saw a man in the park?"

"Yes," said Monsoreau.

"Alone?"

"With Madame de Monsoreau."

"When?" asked Saint-Luc.

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"There, on the left. Look."

And as Monsoreau had been walking with Saint-Luc in the direction of the old thicket, he was able to point out the exact place to his companion from where they stood.

"Hum!" said Saint-Luc, "that wall is in a very bad condition; I must inform the baron that some one or other is injuring his property."

"And whom do you suspect?"

"Whom do I suspect, are you asking?"

"Yes," said the count.

"Suspect of what?"

"Of climbing the wall to enter the park and talk with my wife?"

Saint-Luc seemed to be revolving the matter deeply in his mind, and Monsoreau awaited the result of his meditation anxiously.

"Well?" said he.

"Why, hang it!" answered Saint-Luc, "as far as I can see, it must have been" —

"Who?" eagerly asked the count.

"Nobody but — yourself."

"My dear M. de Saint-Luc, you are jesting," said the count, completely taken aback.

"Jesting? Faith, no. In the early days of my marriage I committed follies of that sort; why should n't you also?"

"Oh, nonsense. I see you are trying to avoid giving me an answer; confess that that is the case, my dear friend. But do not be afraid, I have courage. Help me in my search, and you will be doing me an immense favor."

Saint-Luc scratched his ear.

"I still think it was you," said he.

"A truce to raillery; try and look at the matter seriously, monsieur; for I assure you it is very important."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it, I tell you."

"Oh, then, that is different. And do you know how this man manages to enter?"

"By stealth, of course."

"Often?"

"Undoubtedly; he has left the marks of his feet on the soft stone of the wall; you can see for yourself."

"Yes, I see them."

"And you never saw anything of what I have just told you?"

"Oh," answered Saint-Luc, "I have had some suspicions."

"Ah! now we are coming to it!" gasped the count; "and what did you do?"

"I did nothing. I was not at all uneasy, for I believed it was you."

"But now that I tell you it was not?"

"I believe you, my dear monsieur."

"You believe me?"

"Yes."

"Well, and now?"

"Now I believe it was some one else."

The grand huntsman looked at him almost threateningly; but Saint-Luc never altered his affable, unruffled demeanor.

"Ah!" cried Monsoreau, in a tone so savage that the young man raised his head.

"I have another idea," said he.

"What is it?"

"What if it were" —

"Were who?"

"No."

"No?"

"But it might be" —

"Who?"

"The Duc d'Anjou."

"I thought so, too," returned the count; "but I have made inquiries and I found it could not have been he."

"Oh, the duke is a very wily intriguer."

"I know it, but it was not he."

"You are always answering: 'this is not so and that is

not so,'" said Saint-Luc; "yet you are asking me for information."

"Because, as you are staying at the castle, you ought to know"—

"Hold on a moment," cried Saint-Luc.

"What is it now?"

"I have another idea. If it was n't you and if it was n't the duke, it must have been I."

"You, Saint-Luc?"

"Why not?"

"You to come to the outside of the park and leave your horse there when there was nothing to prevent you from riding up to the castle?"

"Egad, there would be nothing strange in that. You see I am such a whimsical creature," said Saint-Luc.

"Is it likely you would have fled when you saw me on the top of the wall?"

"Faith, many would have fled for less."

"You knew, then, you were acting wrong?" said the count, whose anger was beginning to get the better of him.

"Possibly."

"Ha!" cried the count, turning pale, "so you have been jeering at me, and that for the last quarter of an hour."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Saint-Luc, drawing out his watch and eying Monsoreau with an expression that sent a shudder through his veins, in spite of his ferocious courage, "for twenty minutes."

"But this is an insult, monsieur!" said the count.

"And do you believe you have not insulted me, monsieur, with all those questions of yours, more worthy of a police spy than of a gentleman?"

"Ah! I see everything clearly now."

"A miracle! You see clearly at ten in the forenoon! And pray, what do you see?"

"That you have an understanding with the traitor, the coward, I was near killing yesterday."

"Nothing wonderful in that," answered Saint-Luc; "he is my friend."

"Then, if that be the case, I will kill you instead of him."

"Pshaw! in your own house, suddenly, without warning!"

"Do you think I shall be over-scrupulous about chastising a wretch like you?" cried the exasperated nobleman.

"Ah, M. de Monsoreau, how badly you have been brought up!" replied Saint-Luc, "and how sadly your manners have been spoiled by your constant association with wild beasts! Shame, shame!"

"Do you not see that I am furious!" roared the count, standing before Saint-Luc with folded arms, the hideous contraction of his features showing forth the agony and despair that tore his heart.

"*Mordieu!* I should say I did; and, to tell God's truth, there is no one in the world who can less afford to get in a rage than you; you look absolutely hideous, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

The count, beside himself, clapped his hand on his sword.

"Ah!" said Saint-Luc, "it is you who challenge me, then, not I you; for you see for yourself that I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, coxcomb," answered Monsoreau, "yes, minion, I challenge you."

"Then do me the favor, M. de Monsoreau, to climb over the wall; on the other side of the wall we shall be on neutral ground."

"What does that matter?" cried the count.

"It matters a good deal to me," answered Saint-Luc; "I should not like to kill you almost in your own house."

"Just as you like!" said Monsoreau, hastening to get over.

"Take care! gently, count! a stone there is just ready to fall; it must have been shaken pretty often. Please don't get hurt; I should never forgive myself if you did."

Then Saint-Luc followed the count, and climbed to the top of the wall.

"Come, make haste!" said Monsoreau, drawing his sword.

"Well, I came to the country for pleasure," said Saint-Luc to himself, "and, faith, I am now going to have a little of the sort of amusement I like."

And he jumped to the other side of the wall.

CHAPTER LXVI.

HOW M. DE SAINT-LUC SHOWED M. DE MONSOREAU THE LUNGE THE KING HAD SHOWN HIM.

M. DE MONSOREAU waited for Saint-Luc, sword in hand and stamping the ground in his fury at the delay.

"Are you ready?" said he.

"I say," answered Saint-Luc, "you have taken a position that's rather to your advantage with your back to the sun; still, I don't mind."

Monsoreau wheeled round a little.

"Ah, that's an improvement," said Saint-Luc; "now I shall be better able to see what I am doing."

"Don't spare me," said the count, "for certainly I shall not spare you."

"Indeed!" answered Saint-Luc; "so you really wish to kill me, then?"

"Wish to kill you?—ah! yes—I am determined to kill you."

"Man proposes and God disposes," said Saint-Luc, drawing his sword.

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying— Look at yon bed of poppies and dandelions."

"Well?"

"Well, I mean to lay you there," said Saint-Luc, laughing and placing himself on guard.

Monsoreau took the offensive impetuously and made two or three passes at his antagonist with the utmost quickness, but they were parried with a quickness equal to his own.

"*Pardieu!* monsieur," said Saint-Luc, while playing with his enemy's blade, "you have a very pretty knack with the sword, and your last thrust would have done for any one except Bussy and me."

Monsoreau turned pale: he saw at last the sort of man he had to deal with.

"You are, perhaps, surprised to find," continued Saint-Luc, "that I do not handle it so badly, either. Well, you see, the King, who, as you know, is very fond of me, used to give me lessons, and, among other things, he showed me a certain

lunge which I shall have the pleasure of showing you in a few minutes. I tell you this because, should I kill you suddenly, it must be a pleasure to you to learn that you owe your death to a lunge taught me by the King; this ought to flatter you excessively."

"You are wonderfully witty, monsieur," said Monsoreau, in a rage, at the same time aiming a thrust at him with such force that it might have pierced a wall.

"Oh, a person can only do the best he is able," answered Saint-Luc modestly, springing to one side and by this movement compelling his adversary to half turn round, with the result that he had the sun full in his eyes.

"Ah," said Saint-Luc, "now I have you where I wanted to have you before laying you in the place I intend laying you. Aha! what do you think of that last little pass? Neat, eh? Yes, I am well pleased with it, very well pleased, I assure you. Until now there were fifty chances in a hundred that you might not be killed; now there is only one."

And with a suppleness, vigor, and fury which took Monsoreau completely by surprise, and which no one would have suspected the existence of in this effeminate young man, Saint-Luc lunged five times in rapid succession at the grand huntsman, who parried the thrusts, although quite dazed by the rapidity of his adversary's movements; then Saint-Luc made a feint, parried, and thrust in a peculiar fashion, which the count did not see clearly, owing to the sunlight in his eyes, and plunged his sword into his enemy's chest.

Monsoreau remained on his feet for a moment, like an uprooted oak that is waiting for a breath of air to tell it in what direction it is to fall.

"There go your hundred chances now," said Saint-Luc, "and have the goodness to notice, monsieur, that you will fall just where I said you should."

The count's strength failed him, his hands opened, a dark cloud spread over his eyes, his knees bent under him, and he sank on the poppies, crimsoning the purple flowers with his blood. Saint-Luc, after wiping his sword, stood quietly by, watching the changes that came over the face of the dying man.

"Ah! you have killed me, monsieur," said Monsoreau.

"I did my best to do so," answered Saint-Luc; "but now that I see you stretched there and on the point of death, devil

take me if I am not sorry for what I have done. I respect you, monsieur; you were horribly jealous, but you were a brave man."

And quite satisfied with this funeral oration, Saint-Luc knelt beside Monsoreau and said:

"Have you any last wishes you would like to mention? I give you my word as a gentleman that they shall be executed. I know from my own experience that, when a person is wounded, he is generally thirsty. Shall I get you something to drink?"

Monsoreau did not answer.

He had turned over with his face to the earth, biting the turf and writhing in his blood.

"Poor devil!" muttered Saint-Luc, rising. "O friendship, friendship, thou art an exacting divinity!"

Monsoreau opened his fading eyes, tried to raise his head, and fell back with a dismal groan.

"It's all over!" said Saint-Luc; "he is dead; no use thinking any more about it. It's easy enough saying: 'Think no more about it,' when you have killed a man. Not so easy forgetting it, though. Well, no one can say I have wasted my time in the country."

And, climbing over the wall again, he took his way to the castle through the park.

The first person he perceived was Diane; she was talking with her friend.

"How well black will become her!" said Saint-Luc.

Then approaching the two charming women:

"Excuse me, my dear madame," said he to Diane, "but will you allow me to say a few words in private to Madame de Saint-Luc?"

"Of course, my friend," answered Madame de Monsoreau. "I must go and see my father, who is in the library. When you have finished with M. de Saint-Luc," she added, addressing her friend, "please come and join me there."

"Yes, without fail," replied Jeanne.

And Diane left them, with a bow and a smile.

Husband and wife were alone.

"Why, what is the matter? Why this gloomy mien, husband mine?" asked Madame de Saint-Luc, looking at him merrily.

"Because I feel gloomy," answered Saint-Luc.

"I RESPECT YOU, MONSIEUR; YOU WERE HORRIBLY JEALOUS, BUT YOU WERE A BRAVE MAN."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, an accident, unfortunately."

"To you?" inquired Jeanne, in alarm.

"Not exactly to me, but to a person who was with me?"

"Who is this person?"

"The person I was walking with."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Alas! yes. Poor dear man!"

"What has happened to him?"

"I believe he 's dead."

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, with very natural agitation, "dead!"

"That 's the state of the case."

"He who was here awhile ago, talking and looking round him" —

"Ah, that was just the cause of his death; he looked round him too much, but, above all, he talked too much."

"Saint-Luc, my love," said the young woman, seizing both his hands.

"What 's the matter?"

"You are hiding something from me."

"I? Nothing, I swear to you, not even the place where he lies."

"And where does he lie?"

"Yonder, behind the wall, near the spot where our friend Bussy is in the habit of tying his horse."

"Was it you that killed him, Saint-Luc?"

"Egad, I don't see who else it could be. There were only two of us; I am here safe and sound, and telling you that he is dead. I don't see that it is very hard to guess which of us two killed the other."

"Unhappy man, what have you done!"

"But, my darling," said Saint-Luc, "he challenged me; he was the first to draw the sword."

"It is frightful! frightful! the poor man!"

"Good," said Saint-Luc. "I was sure of it; before another week he will be called Saint Monsoreau."

"But you cannot stay here!" cried Jeanne. "You cannot dwell longer under the roof of the man you have slain."

"The very thing I said to myself, my dear, and so I ran here to ask you to get ready to leave."

"He has not wounded you, I hope?"

"Many thanks! Your question comes a little late; the

interest in me manifested by it, however, restores harmony between us; no, I am uninjured."

"So we are to start, then?"

"As soon as possible, for you understand the accident may be discovered at any moment."

"And what an accident!" cried Madame de Saint-Luc, who could not get the thought of this catastrophe out of her mind.

"Alas!" murmured Saint-Luc.

"But, now I think of it," said Jeanne, "Madame de Monsoreau is a widow."

"Just the very thing I was saying to myself awhile ago."

"After you killed him?"

"No, before."

"Well, well, while I am breaking the news to her" —

"Break it very gently, my darling; spare her conjugal susceptibilities."

"You wicked man! Well, while I am telling her, do you saddle the horses yourself as if for an ordinary ride."

"An excellent idea. You must manage to get hold of many others, for I confess this head of mine is growing just a bit muddled."

"But where are we to go?"

"To Paris."

"Paris! What about the King?"

"The King has forgotten everything by this time; too many important events have happened since then for him to remember our little escapade; besides, if there is war, as is probable, my place is at his side."

"Very well; let us set out for Paris, then."

"Of course; but I want a pen and ink."

"Whom are you writing to?"

"Bussy; you understand I can't very well quit Anjou in this fashion without telling him the reason."

"You are right; you 'll find what you need in my chamber."

Saint-Luc went upstairs, and, with a hand which all his efforts could not keep from trembling, he wrote hastily the following lines:

"Dear Friend: You will learn ere long by the voice of rumor of the accident that has befallen M. de Monsoreau; we had a discussion together, close by the old thicket, on the causes and effects of dilapidated walls, and on the inconvenience produced by horses that travel home without a rider.

"In the heat of the argument, M. de Monsoreau fell upon a bed of poppies and dandelions, and had such a hard fall that he is now as dead as a door nail.

"Your friend for life,

"SAINT-LUC.

"P.S. — As this accident might seem to you, at first sight, somewhat improbable, I had better add that, when the accident occurred, each of us held a sword in his hand.

"I am starting for Paris immediately to make my peace with the King, as these quarters do not seem to me very safe after what has taken place."

Ten minutes later, one of the baron's servants set off for Angers with this letter, while M. and Madame de Saint-Luc left the park by a small gate opening on a cross-road. Diane was in tears at their departure, and very much at a loss, besides, how to relate to her father the sad catastrophe that had just happened.

She had turned away her eyes from Saint-Luc when he approached her.

"The way your friends always treat you if you do them a service," said Saint-Luc afterward to his wife. "Decidedly, there is no gratitude in the world. I happen to be the only person in it who is grateful."

CHAPTER LXVII.

IN WHICH THE QUEEN MOTHER ENTERS ANGERS, BUT NOT IN A VERY TRIUMPHANT FASHION.

ALMOST at the very moment when M. de Monsoreau fell beneath the sword of Saint-Luc, a loud flourish of trumpets sounded before the gates of Angers, which, as we know, were always kept carefully closed.

The guards, who had received previous notice, hoisted the standard and responded with an equally harmonious blast.

Catharine de Medicis was about to enter the city, followed by an imposing train of attendants.

Bussy was at once informed of her arrival; he rose from bed and went to notify the prince, who straightway got into his.

Certainly, the music played by the Angevine trumpets was very fine music, but it had none of that power which levelled the walls of Jericho; the gates of Angers did not open.

Catharine leaned out of the litter so that the guards could see her, expecting that the majesty of a royal countenance would be more effective than the sound of trumpets.

They looked at the queen, even saluted her courteously, but the gates remained closed.

Catharine sent one of her gentlemen to the barriers. He was treated with the utmost politeness.

But when he demanded that the gates should be thrown open for the queen mother, and that her majesty should be received with all due honor, he was told that Angers was a military fortress and its gates could not be opened until certain indispensable formalities were complied with.

The gentleman returned, very crestfallen, to his mistress, and then there dropped from the lips of Catharine, in all the bitterness of their significance, in all the fulness of their meaning, the words which Louis XIV. was to use later on, slightly modified to suit the altered condition of the royal authority :

"I am kept waiting!" she murmured.

And the gentlemen who were beside her trembled.

At length, Bussy, who had been lecturing the duke for half an hour and laying before him a multitude of state reasons, all in favor of the policy he wished him to adopt, — Bussy, we say, came to a decision on his own account.

He had his horse saddled and magnificently caparisoned, selected five gentlemen he knew to be particularly odious to the queen mother, and advanced slowly at their head to meet her majesty.

Catharine was beginning to grow tired, not of waiting, but of devising schemes to avenge the slight of which she was the victim.

She recalled the Arabian story of the rebellious genius, imprisoned in a copper vase, who promised to enrich any one restoring him to freedom, but who, in his rage at having to wait ten centuries for his release, swore then to kill any one rash enough to break the cover.

Catharine's frame of mind was now somewhat similar.

She had intended to be very gracious to the gentlemen who, she believed, would eagerly come to greet her.

Then she made a vow to crush with her wrath the first of them who approached her.

Bussy, in all the trappings of war, appeared at the barrier, and looked vaguely before him, like some nocturnal sentry who listens rather than sees.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

Catharine had expected some show of respect, at the very least; her gentleman-in-waiting looked at her to learn her wishes.

"Go," said she, "go again to the barrier; I hear some one crying: 'Who goes there?' Answer him, monsieur, — it is a mere formality."

The gentleman proceeded to the portcullis.

"It is the queen mother," said he, "who has come to visit the good city of Angers."

"Very well, monsieur," answered Bussy; "be so kind as to turn to the left; about eighty yards from here you will find the postern!"

"The postern!" cried the gentleman, "the postern! A postern for her majesty!"

Bussy was no longer there to hear.

With his friends, who were laughing in their sleeves, he advanced to the spot where he had said the queen mother could enter.

"Did your majesty hear him?" asked the gentleman. "The postern" —

"Oh, yes, I heard; let us enter by the postern, since it is the path pointed out to us."

And she flashed a glance at her attendant that made him turn pale; he knew his ill-timed remark had added to the humiliation imposed on his sovereign.

The queen mother and her retinue turned to the left, and the postern was opened.

Bussy advanced on foot, with sword in hand, beyond the gate, and bowed respectfully to Catharine; the plumes of his companions swept the ground.

"Your majesty," said he, "is welcome to Angers."

But neither did the drummers who were with him beat their drums, nor did his halberdiers present arms.

The queen descended from her litter and leaning on the arm of a gentleman of her suite, walked to the little gate, merely saying:

"Thanks, M. de Bussy."

This was all that came, at present, of the meditations she had been given such a length of time to make.

She marched along with head erect.

Bussy uttered a word of warning and even took hold of her arm.

"Ah! take care, madame," said he, "the door is very low; your majesty might get hurt."

"I must stoop, then?" answered the queen. "I hardly know how to do so; it is the first time I entered a city in this fashion."

These words, though spoken perfectly naturally, had a significance and far-reaching import in the eyes of many present — Angevines as well as sagacious courtiers — that aroused some little alarm; even Bussy twitched his mustache and turned away his eyes.

"You have gone too far," whispered Livarot in his ear.

"Pshaw!" answered Bussy, "she'll have to put up with a good many more experiences of the same sort."

The litter was hoisted over the wall by ropes and pulleys, and Catharine was enabled to proceed in it to the palace. Bussy and his friends got on horseback and rode on each side of the litter.

"My son!" suddenly exclaimed the queen mother; "I do not see my son, M. d'Anjou?"

These words, which she would have wished to leave unspoken, were wrung from her by the rage she could not control. The absence of François at such a moment put the finishing touch on the insults she had received.

"Monseigneur is ill and in bed, madame," said Bussy; "if it were not so, your majesty is well aware his highness would have been the first to meet you and do the honors of *his* city."

And now the hypocrisy of Catharine was sublime.

"Ill! my poor child ill!" she cried. "Ah! gentlemen, let us get on quickly. I hope he is, at least, well cared for."

"We do our best," answered Bussy, staring at her in surprise, as if he would know whether this woman had really a mother's heart.

"Is he aware that I am here?" resumed Catharine, after a silence she had usefully employed in scanning the faces of all the gentlemen present.

"Yes, madame, yes, certainly."

Catharine pinched her lips.

"He must be very sick, then," she added, pityingly.

"Awfully sick, indeed," answered Bussy. "His highness is subject to these sudden indispositions."

"It was a sudden attack, was it, M. de Bussy?"

"Undoubtedly, madame."

In this way they reached the palace, between two long lines of spectators, massed on each side of the litter.

Bussy made his way to the duke with such speed that when he entered the bedroom he was out of breath.

"She is here," said he. "Look out" —

"She is furious, then?"

"Yes, she is rather in a temper."

"Does she complain?"

"No, much worse; she smiles."

"How did the people receive her?"

"The people were as still as a post; they stared at this woman in dumb terror; they may not know her, but their instinct tells them what she is."

"And she?"

"Sent them kisses, all the time biting the tips of her fingers."

"The devil!"

"The devil; yes, you 're right, monseigneur. You know now with whom the game is to be played; play it cunningly."

"It will be war between us, will it not?"

"Yes, with the odds against you. Ask a hundred to get ten, and, with her, you may thank your stars if you get five."

"Pshaw! you think me so weak, then, do you? Are you all there? Why has not Monsoreau returned?" asked the duke.

"I suppose he is at Méridor — Oh, we can do very well without him."

"Her majesty the queen mother!" cried the usher, at the threshold of the apartment.

And Catharine appeared at the same moment, looking pale, and dressed in black, according to her custom.

The duke made a movement to rise. But Catharine, with an agility hardly to be expected from a woman of her age, flung herself into her son's arms and covered his face with kisses.

"She will stifle him," thought Bussy, "and, *mordieu!* they are real kisses!"

She did more, she wept.

"We had better be on our guard," said Antraguet to Bussy; "every tear will be paid for by a hogshead of blood."

When she had finished her embraces Catharine sat down by the duke's pillow, and Bussy made a sign to his companions to withdraw. As for himself, he acted as if he were at home, leaned against one of the bedposts, and listened tranquilly.

"Would you not be kind enough to look after my poor attendants, my dear M. de Bussy?" said Catharine, abruptly. "Next to our son, you are our dearest friend; and you are quite familiar with the palace, are you not? You will, then, I am sure, do me this favor."

It was impossible not to obey.

"Caught!" said Bussy to himself.

"Madame," he answered, "I am only too happy to do anything for your majesty, and so I take my leave."

Then he added, in his own mind:

"You are not as well acquainted with the doors here as you are with those of the Louvre; I'll return."

And he passed out, unable to make even a sign to the duke. Catharine distrusted him, and so never took her eyes off him for a moment.

Catharine tried first to find out if her son was really sick or only pretending to be so.

She would base all her diplomatic operations on the result of her discoveries.

But François, as was to be expected from his mother's son, played his part to perfection.

She had wept; he was in a burning fever.

Catharine was deceived; she believed him really ill, and hoped to have more influence over a mind enfeebled by sufferings.

Her marks of tender affection for the duke became more numerous than ever; she embraced him anew and wept so freely that François was amazed and inquired the cause of her emotion.

"You have run so great a risk, my child," she answered.

"While escaping from the Louvre, mother?"

"Oh, no; after you had escaped."

"How is that?"

"Those who aided you in this unhappy flight"—

"Well?"

"Were your most bitter enemies."

"She knows nothing," he thought, "but she would like to know."

"The King of Navarre," she broke out, bluntly, "the eternal scourge of our race — oh! I was well aware it was he."

"Ah!" said François to himself; "so she knows."

"Do you know," said she, "that he boasts of it, and believes that he will now carry all before him?"

"It is impossible, mother," he answered; "some one has been practising on your credulity."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he had nothing to do with my escape, and, even though he had, I am perfectly safe, as you see — I have not met the King of Navarre for two years."

"That is not the only danger I want to speak to you about, my son," said Catharine, feeling that the stroke had not told.

"And what is the other one, mother?" he replied, directing a glance frequently at the tapestry in front of the alcove behind the queen, which was shaking.

Catharine approached François, and, in tones she intended should inspire him with terror:

"The King's anger!" said she, "the furious anger that now threatens you."

"Oh, that danger," he answered, "is pretty much on a level with the other, madame; I have no doubt my brother is in a furious rage; but I am safe."

"You really believe that?" said she, in a voice calculated to intimidate the boldest.

The tapestry trembled.

"I am sure of it," said the duke; "the more so, my kind mother, that you yourself have come hither to warn me of it."

"Why so?" asked Catharine, disturbed by the prince's calmness.

"Because," said he, after another look at the tapestry, "if you had been charged only with threats you would not have come, and the King, in that case, would have hesitated before he placed such a hostage as your majesty in my power."

Catharine raised her head, alarmed.

"I a hostage!" she exclaimed.

"The most sacred and venerable of all hostages," he answered with a smile, kissing her hand, and directing another triumphant glance at the tapestry.

Catharine dropped her arms by her side, completely overwhelmed; she could not guess that Bussy was watching his master through a secret and partly open door, holding him in check under her very eyes, and, almost ever since the conversation had opened, quickening his courage whenever he showed signs of faltering.

"My son," said she, at length, "you are quite right; my message to you is a message of peace."

"I will listen, mother," said François; "with all the respect I am in the habit of showing for every word you utter; I think it looks as if we were beginning to understand each other."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

GREAT ISSUES OFTEN HAVE SMALL CAUSES.

It was evident to Catharine that her efforts so far had been abortive.

Her discomfiture was so unexpected and, above all, so different from anything in her experience, that she wondered if her son could be as firm in his refusal as he seemed, when a quite trivial incident suddenly changed the aspect of affairs.

We have seen battles that were almost lost won by a change in the direction of the wind, and *vice versa;* Marengo and Waterloo are cases in point.

A grain of sand can alter the working of the most powerful machine.

Bussy, as we have mentioned already, was stationed in a secret lobby running into the Duc d'Anjou's alcove, and so placed that he could be seen only by the prince; from his hiding-place he thrust his head out through a slit in the tapestry whenever a word was uttered that appeared dangerous to his cause.

His cause, as must be already plain to the reader, was war at any price. He had to stop in Anjou as long as M. de Monsoreau remained there, so as to be in a position to watch the husband and visit the wife.

Notwithstanding the extreme simplicity of this policy of his, it unsettled the entire policy of France to an extraordinary degree; great issues often have small causes.

This was the reason why Bussy, with many a wink and many a furious grimace, and swaggering gestures and terrific frowns, was inciting his master to assume an attitude of positive truculence.

The duke, who was afraid of Bussy, allowed himself to be incited, and, as we have seen, no one could have been more truculent with a mother than he was with Catharine.

Catharine was, then, beaten at all points, and was thinking only of effecting an honorable retreat, when a trifling occurrence, almost as unlooked for as the Duc d'Anjou's obstinacy, came to her rescue.

Suddenly, just at the most racy part of the conversation between mother and son, just when the Duc d'Anjou was exhibiting the most stubbornness, Bussy felt some one pulling at his cloak.

Anxious not to lose a word of the dialogue, he stretched his hand round to the place where he experienced the tugging, and, without ever turning, caught a fist; travelling up further, he discovered an arm, after the arm a shoulder, and after the shoulder a man.

Seeing then that the matter was worth attending to, he turned round.

The man was Rémy.

Bussy was going to speak, but Rémy laid a finger on his lips, and gently drew his master into the adjoining chamber.

"What is the matter, Rémy?" asked the count, impatiently, "and why do you disturb me at such a moment?"

"A letter," said Rémy, in a low voice.

"The devil take you! For a mere letter you drag me away from a colloquy as important as the one I and the Duc d'Anjou have just been having together!"

Rémy was not at all put out by this sally.

"There are letters and letters," said he.

"He 's sure to have a reason for what he does," thought Bussy. "Where does this come from?" he asked.

"From Méridor."

"Ah!" cried Bussy, eagerly; "from Méridor! Thanks, my dear Rémy, thanks!"

"I have not done wrong, then?"

"As if you ever did wrong! Where is the letter?"

"Ah, that is the very thing that led me to think it of the highest importance; the messenger will give it to none but you."

"He is right. Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Bring him in."

Rémy opened the door and beckoned to a man that looked like a groom to enter.

"This is M. de Bussy," said he, pointing to the count.

"Give it to me," said Bussy; "I am the person you are looking for," and he handed him a demi-pistole.

"Oh, I know you well," said the groom, giving him the letter.

"Was it from her you received it?"

"No, not from her, but from him."

"Whom do you mean by him?" asked Bussy, glancing at the address.

"M. de Saint-Luc."

"Ah! ah!"

Bussy had become slightly pale, for at the words "but from him" he fancied the letter might have come from the husband and not from the wife, and the mere thought of Monsoreau had the curious effect of making Bussy change color.

Bussy turned round to read, and to hide, while reading, that emotion which every one must manifest on the receipt of an important letter, unless he be Cæsar Borgia, Machiavelli, Catharine de Médicis, or the devil.

Our poor Bussy did right to turn round, for, before he had finished the letter, with which our readers are already acquainted, the blood surged to his temples and into his eyes like a storm-driven sea; from pale he became purple, was for a moment stunned, and, feeling that he should fall, he tottered to an arm-chair near the window and sank into it.

"Go away," said Rémy to the groom, who was quite bewildered by the effect produced by the letter he had brought.

Rémy pushed him outside, and then the messenger took to his heels; he felt the news in the letter was bad, and feared he might be asked to surrender the money he had just received.

Rémy returned to the count and shook his arm.

"*Mordieu!*" cried he, "answer me on the instant, or by Saint Æsculapius, I'll bleed every limb in your body!"

Bussy looked up. He was no longer red, he was no longer dazed; but he was very gloomy.

"Look," said he, "at what Saint-Luc has done for me."

And he handed Rémy the letter.

Remy read eagerly.

"Well," he replied, "all this strikes me as very fine. M. de Saint-Luc is a gallant man. I rather like people who expedite the passage of a soul to purgatory in this fashion."

"It is incredible!" stammered Bussy.

"Certainly, it is incredible; but that has nothing to do with the question. This is how we stand now: in nine months I'll have a Comtesse de Bussy for my patient. *Mordieu!* have no fear; as an accoucheur I'm a match for Ambroise Paré himself."

"Yes," said Bussy; "she shall be my wife."

"I don't see that there can be much trouble about that; she is a good deal more your wife now than she has ever been her husband's."

"Monsoreau dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Le Haudouin; "it was his fate."

"Oh, it seems to me, Rémy, as if I were in a dream. What! never again to behold the spectre that was always coming between me and happiness. Oh, Rémy, we must be mistaken."

"Not the least in the world. *Mordieu* — read the letter again: 'fell upon a bed of poppies and dandelions' — see! — 'had such a hard fall that he is now dead' — see! — I have often noticed that it is a very dangerous thing to fall on poppies; but I used to be under the impression formerly that only women were exposed to this peril."

"But," said Bussy, who paid very little attention to the quips of his companion, and was trying to pursue his own thoughts through the turns and windings of their complicated course, "Diane cannot remain at Méridor. I do not wish it. She must go somewhere else, somewhere where she can forget."

"I don't know a better place than Paris," answered Le Haudouin; "no place in the world where you forget more easily than Paris."

"You are right. She can occupy her little house in the Rue des Tournelles, and we'll spend the ten months of her widowhood there in close retirement, that is, if it be possible for happiness to remain concealed from public eyes. Then, the morning of the celebration of our marriage will be but the renewal of the bliss of the evening before."

"I agree with you," said Rémy; "but, in order to be able to go to Paris" —

"Well?"

"One thing is necessary."

"What is it?"

"Peace in Anjou."

"True," answered Bussy, "nothing truer. Great heavens! what a lot of time lost, and lost uselessly!"

"Which means that you are going to get on horseback and ride to Méridor."

"No, no, not I, but you. I cannot possibly leave here at present. Besides, at such a time, my presence would be almost improper."

"Where am I to see her? Shall I go to the castle?"

"No; go first to the old thicket; she may be walking there, in expectation of my arrival. Then, if you perceive no sign of her, proceed to the castle."

"What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her I'm half mad."

And pressing the hand of the young man upon whom his experience had taught him to rely as if he were a second self, he hurried to resume his place in the corridor at the entrance to the alcove behind the tapestry.

During Bussy's absence Catharine had been endeavoring to regain the ground his presence had caused her to lose.

"My son," she had said, "I will never believe that a mother and son can fail to understand each other."

"Still, you see," was the duke's answer, "that such a thing sometimes happens."

"Never, when she wishes it."

"You mean, madame, when they wish it," retorted the prince, quite proud of his courage and looking at the alcove in the expectation of being rewarded by an approving glance from Bussy.

"But I wish it!" cried Catharine; "surely, François, that must be clear to you! — I wish it."

And the tone of her voice contrasted with her words; the words were imperious, the voice was almost suppliant.

"You wish it?" replied the Duc d'Anjou, with a smile.

"Yes," said Catharine, "I wish it and I am ready to make any sacrifice to achieve this object."

"Ah!" muttered François, "the devil you will!"

"Yes, my dear child, say what you want, what you require. Speak! — command!"

"Oh! mother!" said François, almost embarrassed at a victory so complete that it left him no opportunity to act as an unrelenting conqueror.

"Listen, my son," began Catharine, in her most caressing voice, "you would not drown a kingdom in blood, would you? Oh, that is not possible. You are neither a bad Frenchman nor a bad brother."

"My brother insulted me, madame, and I owe him nothing, either as my brother or my king."

"But I, François, I! You have nothing to complain of in my regard?"

"Yes, madame, for you abandoned me!" returned the duke, thinking that Bussy was still in his place and could hear him as before.

"Ah! you wish to kill me, then?" said Catharine, dejectedly. "Well, be it so! a mother had better die than live to witness her children murder each other."

It is hardly necessary to state that Catharine had not the least intention in the world of dying.

"Oh! do not say that, madame, you break my heart!" cried François, whose heart was as intact as it had ever been.

Catharine burst into tears.

The duke took her hands in his and tried to calm her, but not without many an anxious look in the direction of the alcove.

"But what do you want?" said she; "at least, state your wishes, that we may know where we stand."

"What do you want of me yourself, mother? Come, now, mother," said François; "speak out; I am willing to listen."

"I want you to return to Paris, my dear child; I want you to return to the court of the King, your brother, who will receive you with open arms."

"Ah! madame, I can see things clearly enough. I rather think that, if I took your advice, it is the Bastile and not my brother that would receive me with open arms."

"No, return, return, and upon my honor, upon my love as a mother, nay, I swear it upon the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord" — and here Catharine made the sign of the cross — "that you shall be received by the King as though you were king and he the Duc d'Anjou."

The duke's eyes were fixed obstinately on the tapestry.

"Accept, my son," continued Catharine, "you shall receive

additional appanages; tell me, would you like to have guards?"

"Oh, madame, your son has given me guards already, guards of honor even, since those chosen by him were his four minions."

"Now, now, my son, do not answer me thus; the guards he will give you shall be chosen by yourself, and their captain, should you desire it, shall be M de Bussy."

The duke, staggered by this offer, which he thought must also have its effect on Bussy, looked again at the alcove, expecting, with some trepidation, to encounter the flaming eyes of his follower, who was certain to be gnashing his white teeth in his excitement.

But — wonder of wonders! — Bussy was there, sure enough; but Bussy smiling and joyous, Bussy nodding his head every second in approval.

"What does this mean?" he asked; "did Bussy favor a war only that he might become captain of my guards?"

"Then," said he aloud, but as if communing with himself, "ought I to accept?"

"Yes! yes!" was Bussy's answer, given with hands and shoulders and head.

"In that case," continued the duke, "should I leave Anjou and return to Paris?"

"Yes! yes! yes!" went on Bussy, who was becoming more and more frantic in his gestures of assent.

"Why, my dear child," said Catharine, "you cannot find it very unpleasant to return to Paris?"

"Upon my faith," said the duke to himself, "it's all a mystery. It was agreed between us that I should make no concession, and here now he 's all for peace and reconciliation."

"Well!" asked Catharine, anxiously, "what is your answer?"

"Mother," replied the duke, who desired to know Bussy's reason for backing out in this fashion, "I will reflect, and to-morrow" —

"He surrenders," thought Catharine. "I have won the battle."

"After all," said the prince to himself, "perhaps Bussy is right."

And, with another embrace, mother and son separated.

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW MONSOREAU OPENED AND SHUT HIS EYES AND OPENED THEM AGAIN, THEREBY PROVING HE WAS NOT DEAD.

SWEET it is to have a true friend, the sweeter because true friends are so rare.

So thought Rémy as he galloped across the country on one of the best mounts in the prince's stables.

He would have liked to have taken Roland, but M. de Monsoreau had a prior claim to the animal, and so he was forced to select another.

"I am very fond of M. de Bussy," said he to himself, "and I believe M. de Bussy is very fond of me also. The thought of this gives me such a pleasant sensation to-day that I feel as if I had happiness enough for two."

Then he added, after a deep respiration:

"Really, I 'm beginning to think my heart is no longer large enough for my body."

"And now," he continued, "in what style am I to address Madame Diane?

"If she be ceremonious, solemn, gloomy: mute salutations, obsequious bows, a hand laid on the heart; if she smile, I must make a leg, indulge in a few pirouettes, and execute a polonaise all by myself alone.

"If M. de Saint-Luc be still in the castle, of which I am in doubt, he will not object to a mild hurrah; or a thanksgiving, in Latin, of course, might not be distasteful. I am rather inclined to think he will not suffer from lowness of spirits —

"Ah! I 'm near the spot."

In fact, the horse, after turning to the left and then to the right, and after following the flowery lane with which we are acquainted, had entered the grove that stood in front of the Méridor park wall.

"What a profusion of beautiful poppies everywhere!" said Rémy. "That reminds me of our grand huntsman. Poor dear man! I 'll wager the ones he fell on were not finer than these."

Rémy came closer to the wall.

Suddenly his horse stopped, with nostrils distended and eyes staring fixedly.

Rémy, who was going very fast, and was not expecting a

halt, had a very narrow escape from being thrown over the head of Mithridate.

For this was the name of the steed that had taken Roland's place.

Rémy, who, from practice, had grown to be a fearless horseman, plunged his spurs deep into the animal's flanks; but Mithridate did not budge; he had doubtless got his name from the many points of resemblance between him and the stubborn king of Pontus.

Le Haudouin, in amazement, examined the ground to find out the obstacle that caused his horse to behave in such a manner; all he saw was a wide pool of blood which the earth and the flowers were gradually drinking.

"Ah!" he cried, "I wonder was it here that Saint-Luc ran Monsoreau through with his sword."

Rémy raised his eyes and looked round him.

Ten yards away, under a clump of trees, he perceived two legs that seemed already stiff and a body that looked stiffer still.

The legs were stretched out to their full length; the body was lying against the wall.

"Ha! Monsoreau himself!" muttered Rémy. "*Hic obiit Nimrod.* Hum! if the widow leaves him in this way to the ravens and vultures, it is a good sign for us. I rather think the accompaniment to my funeral oration will be the pirouettes, and I shall have to make a leg and dance the polonaise."

And Rémy, after alighting, advanced a few steps in the direction of the body.

"Queer!" said he, "the man is dead, dead as a herring, and he is here, while his blood is over yonder. Ah! there is the track. He must have crawled hither from down there, or perhaps that good-natured Saint-Luc, who is charity itself, propped him up against the wall so that the blood might not fly to his head. Yes, that 's it, and so he died with his eyes open and without any distortion of his features. Yes; he is dead, dead beyond yea or nay."

And Rémy touched the wound with his finger.

Then he recoiled, struck dumb with horror: the two eyes which he had seen open closed, and a pallor more livid than that which had first struck him spread over the face before him.

Rémy himself became almost as pale as Monsoreau, but, as

he was a doctor, that is to say, something of a materialist, he muttered, while scratching the end of his nose :

" *Credere portentis mediocre.* If he closed his eyes, he did so because he is n't dead."

And as, in spite of his materialism, the situation was disagreeable, and as the joints of his knees betrayed a greater weakness than was pleasant, he sat down, or rather dropped down, at the foot of the tree against which he was leaning, and found himself face to face with the corpse.

" I have read somewhere, I don't know very well where," said he, " of certain pulsatory phenomena which are really only evidence of the subsidence of matter; in other words, of the beginning of corruption. This devil of a man must trouble us even after his death! Yes, faith, his eyes are shut and shut fast, but yet the pallor has increased, *chroma chloron,* as Galen says; *color albus,* according to Cicero, who was a very clever orator. However, there is one way of ascertaining whether he is dead or whether he is not, and that is to give him six inches of my sword in the stomach; if he does not move then, that will be proof positive he 's dead."

And Rémy was preparing to make this charitable experiment — he had, in fact, his hand on his sword — when the eyes of Monsoreau opened anew. This second incident produced on Rémy an effect quite different from that of the first. He jumped up as if moved by a spring, and a cold sweat bathed his forehead.

This time the eyes of the dead man remained wide open.

" He is not dead," murmured Rémy, " he is not dead. Egad! this is a pretty state of things for us!"

Then a thought naturally occurred to the young man.

" He is alive; no doubt," said he, " but if I kill him, he 'll be dead for sure."

And he stared at Monsoreau, who stared at him in turn with such terrified eyes that it almost seemed as if he could read what was passing through the physician's soul.

" Faugh!" cried Rémy, suddenly, " faugh! what a hideous thought! God is my witness that, if he stood there before me, sword in hand and firm on his feet, I would kill him with the sincerest pleasure. But if I were to do so now when he is helpless and almost dead, it would be worse than a crime, it would be an infamy."

" Help!" murmured Monsoreau, " help! I am dying."

"*Mordieu!*" said Rémy, "my position is embarrassing. I am a doctor, and, consequently, it is my duty to succor my fellow-men when they need my aid. It is true this Monsoreau is so ugly that I might almost be justified in denying that he is a fellow-creature of mine, but he is of the same species, — *genus homo*. Well, well, I must forget that my name is Le Haudouin, Bussy's friend; I must only remember that I am a physician."

"Help!" repeated the wounded man.

"I am here," said Rémy.

"Go and get me a priest and a doctor."

"The doctor is found already, and perhaps he will enable you to do without the priest."

"Le Haudouin!" murmured M. de Monsoreau, recognizing Rémy, "by what chance" —

As will be seen, M. de Monsoreau was still faithful to his character; even in his agony he showed distrust and asked questions.

Rémy understood the full import of this inquiry.

This wood was no public thoroughfare, and no one was likely to be there except he had particular business; the question was, then, almost natural.

"How came you here?" asked Monsoreau anew, his suspicions lending him a little strength.

"Why," answered Le Haudouin, "because I met M. de Saint-Luc about three miles away."

"Ah! my murderer," stammered Monsoreau, turning pale with anger as well as pain.

"He said to me: 'Rémy, run to a part of the wood called the old thicket; there you will find a man dead.'"

"Dead!" repeated Monsoreau.

"Hang it! he believed you were, so you need n't be angry with him for that; then I came, I saw, and you were conquered."

"And now tell me — you are speaking to a man, do not be afraid of speaking frankly — tell me am I mortally wounded?"

"Ah, the devil! you ask a question not so easily answered," said Rémy. "However, I'll try to do so; let us see."

As we have said, the conscience of the doctor had got the better of the devotion of the friend.

Rémy approached Monsoreau, then, and with all the usual precautions removed his cloak, doublet, and shirt.

The sword had penetrated the chest between the sixth and seventh ribs.

"Hum!" said Rémy, "do you suffer much?"

"Not in the breast, but in the back."

"Ah, let me see," asked Rémy; "in what part of the back?"

"Below the shoulder-bone."

"The blade encountered a bone," observed Rémy; "hence the pain."

And he examined the spot where the count told him he suffered most.

"No," said the surgeon, "I was mistaken; the sword encountered nothing, and passed clean through. Upon my word, about as pretty a thrust as I have ever seen. There is a real pleasure in patching up the wounds made by M. de Saint-Luc; the sun actually shines through the hole he made in you, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

Monsoreau fainted, but Rémy was not disturbed by this weakness.

"Ah, that is well: syncope, low pulse, quite natural." He felt the hands and legs: "the extremities cold." He applied his ear to the chest: "absence of noisy respiration. The devil! I'm afraid Madame de Monsoreau won't be a widow long."

At this moment a slight reddish foam bathed the wounded man's lips.

Rémy quickly drew a surgeon's case from his pocket and took out a lancet; then he tore off a strip from his patient's shirt and bound it round his arm.

"Now we 'll see," said he to himself. "If the blood flow, by my faith, it's unlikely that Madame Diane will be a widow; but if it do not flow — Ah! ah! it flows, egad! Forgive me, dear M. de Bussy, forgive me; but, faith, a doctor is a doctor before everything."

The blood, in fact, after, so to speak, hesitating for an instant, had spurted freely from the vein; and, almost at the same moment, the wounded man breathed and opened his eyes.

"Ah!" he stammered, "I thought all was over."

"Not yet, my dear monsieur, not yet; it is even possible" —

"That I may recover?"

"Mercy on us, yes! But let me first close the wound. Keep quiet; don't stir. You see, nature, at this moment, is

caring for you within, just as I am caring for you on the outside. I make the blood flow; she stops it. Ah! nature is a great surgeon, my dear monsieur, — stay, let me wipe your lips."

And Rémy passed a pocket handkerchief over the lips of the count.

"At first," said his patient, "I spat out a mouthful of blood."

"Well, you see now," answered Rémy, "that the hæmorrhage is already arrested. Capital! So much the better — or rather, so much the worse!"

"What! so much the worse!"

"So much the better for you, certainly; but so much the worse! I know what I mean. My dear M. de Monsoreau, I 'm afraid I 'm going to have the happiness of curing you."

"How is that? You are afraid?"

"Yes, I know what I am saying."

"You think, then, I shall recover?"

"Alas!"

"You are a rather strange sort of doctor, M. Rémy."

"What does that matter to you, if I save you. Now, let me see" —

Rémy had just stopped the bleeding. He rose.

"You are not going to forsake me now?" said the count.

"Ah! you talk too much, my dear monsieur. Too much talking is hurtful. If that were the case," muttered Le Haudouin to himself, "I should rather advise him to cry aloud."

"I do not understand you."

"That 's lucky. Now your wound is dressed."

"Well?"

"Well, I am going to the castle to fetch help."

"And what am I to do during the time?"

"Keep quiet, do not stir, breathe very gently, and try to avoid coughing. Which is the nearest house?"

"The Castle of Méridor."

"How do you go there?" asked Rémy, affecting the most profound ignorance.

"You can climb over the wall, and then you will be in the park; or you can follow the park wall until you come to the gate."

"Very well; so I am off."

"Thanks, generous man!"

"If you knew how exceeding generous I am," stammered Rémy, "you would be even more thankful still."

And, mounting his horse, he galloped in the direction pointed out by the count.

In about five minutes he was at the castle; all its tenants, as bustling and excited as ants whose dwelling has been violated, were searching thickets, clearings, every sort of out of the way place, for the body of their master, but, so far, in vain. This was the fault of Saint-Luc who, to gain time, had left directions that led them astray.

Rémy fell among them like a thunderbolt and carried them off with him.

He was so eager to bring them to the rescue that Madame de Monsoreau could not help staring at him in wonder.

A secret, almost imperceptible thought crossed her mind, and in a second had tarnished the angelic purity of her soul.

"And I thought he was Bussy's friend!" she murmured, as Rémy disappeared, taking with him a handbarrow, lint, fresh water, and, in fact, all that was needed in the circumstances.

Æsculapius himself could not have used his divine wings to better purpose than Rémy used his legs.

CHAPTER LXX.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU WENT TO MÉRIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND HOW HE WAS RECEIVED BY M. DE MONSOREAU.

As soon as the Duc d'Anjou had broken off his conversation with his mother, he hurried away in search of Bussy; he was eager to find out the reason for the astounding change in the count's opinions.

Bussy had gone to his lodgings and was there reading Saint-Luc's letter the fifth time, every line making a more and more pleasant impression on him after every reading.

Catharine, too, had retired to her apartments, had summoned her attendants thither, and ordered them to have everything in readiness for her departure, which she believed

she could arrange for the next day, or for the day after, at the latest.

Bussy received the prince with a charming smile.

"What, monseigneur," said he, "your highness deigns to visit my humble house?"

"Yes, *mordieu!*" answered the duke, "and I have come to ask you for an explanation."

"An explanation from me?"

"Yes, from you."

"I listen, monseigneur."

"How is this?" cried the duke; "you bid me to be armed from top to toe, so as to be proof against the demands of my mother, and to support the attack valiantly; I do so, and in the very heat of battle, at the very moment when every blow has failed to move me, you come and say: 'take off your armor, monseigneur, take it off.'"

"The advice I gave you, monseigneur, was entirely due to the fact that I was ignorant of the purpose of Madame Catharine's visit. Now that I see she has come to advance your highness's glory and honor" —

"Advance my glory and honor! Well, that was the very subject I was to have your opinion on. What do you think of the business?"

"Well, what does your highness want? Let us look at the matter calmly. You want to triumph over your enemies, do you not? I do not, like certain persons, imagine that you want to become king of France."

The duke looked at Bussy sourly.

"There may be some who would advise you to try to do so, but, believe me, they are your worst enemies. If they are resolute and obstinate in this notion of theirs and you cannot get rid of them, send them to me; I will show them how absurd they are."

The duke frowned.

"Besides, examine into the matter yourself, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "fathom your own heart, as, I think, the Bible says; have you a hundred thousand men, ten million of livres, alliances with foreign powers, and, above all, would you turn against your King?"

"My King was not at all backward in turning against me," said the duke.

"Oh, if you take that ground, you are in the right. Well,

then, put forward your claims, get yourself crowned, and assume the title of king of France. Nothing could please me better than your success, for, if you grow great, I grow great along with you."

"Who talks of being king of France?" retorted the prince, bitterly. "You are discussing a question I have never asked any one to answer, not even myself."

"Well, then, that point is settled, monseigneur, and there is no dispute between us, since we are agreed on the main subject."

"We are agreed, you say?"

"At least, so it seems to me. Make them give you a guard and five hundred thousand livres. Before peace is signed, demand a subsidy from Anjou to carry on the war. Once you have it, you can keep it, it does n't bind you to anything. In this fashion, we shall have men, money, power, and we shall go — God knows where!"

"But once in Paris, once they have got hold of me, once they have me in their clutches, they can laugh at me."

"Oh, nonsense, monseigneur! Surely you have no such idea in your mind as that! Laugh at you, indeed! Did you not hear the queen mother's offer?"

"She offered a good many things."

"I understand; and that is what alarms you?"

"Yes."

"But, among them, she offered you a company of guards, though even that company were to be commanded by M. de Bussy."

"Undoubtedly, that was one of her offers."

"Then take my advice, accept; appoint Bussy your captain; Antraguet and Livarot your lieutenants; Ribeirac ensign. Give the four of us full liberty to make up the company just as we see fit; and then, take my word for it, with this escort at your heels, I 'd like to see the man would laugh at you or fail to salute you as you pass, though he were the King himself."

"By my faith, I believe you 're right, Bussy. I 'll think of it."

"Yes, think of it, monseigneur."

"Of course. But, by the way, what was that you were reading so attentively when I entered?"

"Ah! excuse me, I was forgetting, — a letter."

"A letter?"

"Which must have as much interest for you as for me; what the devil was I thinking of not to show it to you at once!"

"It contains important news, then?"

"Great heavens! yes, and sad news as well. M. de Monsoreau is dead!"

"What's that you say?" cried the duke, starting back in amazement, though Bussy, who had his eyes fixed on the prince, fancied that he was quite as much delighted as surprised.

"He is dead, monseigneur."

"Dead! M. de Monsoreau?"

"Why, dear me, yes! are n't we all mortal?"

"Yes, but a person does n't die suddenly like that."

"That depends. Supposing you 're killed?"

"Was he killed, then?"

"It would seem so."

"By whom?"

"By Saint-Luc, with whom he had a quarrel."

"Ah! dear Saint-Luc!" cried the prince.

"Hold!" said Bussy. "I was not aware that you and 'dear Saint-Luc' were such good friends."

"Saint-Luc is my brother's friend, and, now that we are reconciled, my brother's friends are mine," answered the duke.

"Capital!" said Bussy. "I am delighted, monseigneur, to find you in such an admirable frame of mind."

"And you are sure" —

"Faith, as sure as I can very well be so far. Here is Saint-Luc's note informing me of his death; but as I am as incredulous as you are and not at all certain yet, I have sent my surgeon Rémy to find out if the news be true, and, in case it is, to assure the old baron that I sympathize with his grief."

"Dead! Monsoreau dead!" repeated the Duc d'Anjou; "and died *quite alone!*"

The words escaped him unwittingly, just as *dear Saint-Luc* had escaped him. The unpremeditated naturalness of both exclamations was frightful.

"He did not die quite alone," said Bussy, "since Saint-Luc, who killed him, must have been with him."

"Oh, I know what I 'm saying," answered the duke.

"Did your highness, might I ask, give orders to some one else to kill him?" inquired Bussy.

"No, upon my faith; did you?"

"I! Oh, monseigneur, I am not a great prince and cannot have that sort of job done for me by others; I am obliged to attend to such things myself."

"Ah! Monsoreau, Monsoreau!" muttered the prince, with his appalling smile.

"I say, monseigneur! it really looks as if you hated this poor count."

"No, it was you that hated him."

"Oh, it was quite natural I should hate him," said Bussy, who could not keep from blushing. "Have I not to thank him for the terrible humiliation your highness inflicted on me?"

"So you still remember that?"

"Good heavens! no, monseigneur, as you can see for yourself; but you, whose servant, friend, and creature"—

"Enough," said the prince, interrupting a conversation that threatened to become embarrassing; "order my horses to be saddled, Bussy."

"Your horses to be saddled, and why?"

"To go to Méridor; I wish to condole with Madame Diane on her loss. Besides, I have been intending to visit the family for some time, and I really do not know why I have not done so before; but I am determined not to delay any longer. *Corbleu!* I am not aware of any cause for it, but I never felt so much in the vein for paying compliments as I do to-day."

"By my soul," said Bussy to himself, "now that Monsoreau is dead and I have no longer any fear that he 'll sell his wife to the duke, it don't much matter whether he see her again or not. If he attack her I will defend her, and that, too, without help from others. And, since this gives me an opportunity of seeing her again also, I don't see why I should n't profit by it."

And he went out to order the horses to be saddled.

A quarter of an hour later, while Catharine was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, with the object of recovering her strength after the fatigue of her journey, the prince, Bussy and ten gentlemen, mounted on fine horses, were riding to Méridor, all as light-hearted as youth, fine weather, and a stretch of flower-enamelled turf could render men as well as horses.

At sight of this magnificent cavalcade the porter of the castle came as far as the fosse to ask the visitors' names.

"The Duc d'Anjou!" cried the prince.

At once the porter seized a horn and blew a blast that brought all the servants running to the drawbridge.

There was soon heard the sound of steps hurrying to and fro and up and down in the halls and corridors and on the stairs; windows were opened; there was the noise of bolts and bars as the doors were unfastened, and the old baron appeared on the threshold, with the keys of his castle in his hand.

"It is wonderful how little Monsoreau is regretted!" said the duke; "see, Bussy, all those people look as if nothing had happened."

A woman appeared on the steps.

"Ah! the beautiful Diane!" cried the duke; "are you looking, Bussy, are you looking?"

"Yes, I see her, monseigneur," answered the young man; "but," he added, in a low voice, "I don't see Rémy."

Diane came outside the house, and, immediately behind her, came a litter in which lay Monsoreau, his eyes burning with fever or with jealousy; he was more like some Indian sultan on his palanquin than a corpse on his bier.

"Oh! ha! what does this mean?" cried the duke, addressing his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief with which he was trying to conceal his emotion.

"Long live the Duc d'Anjou!" said Monsoreau, contriving by a violent effort to raise and wave his hand.

"Gently," said a voice behind him, "you will do yourself an injury."

It was Rémy, who, faithful to his duty as a doctor, was giving this prudent warning to his patient.

Astonishment does not last long among courtiers — on their faces, at least. The Duc d'Anjou at once took measures to dispel this general stupefaction and to substitute smiles in its place.

"Oh! my dear count," he cried, "what a happy surprise! Do you know, we were told you were dead?"

"Pray, come near me, your highness," said the wounded man, "let me kiss your highness's hand. Thank God! not only am I not dead, but I shall live, I hope, to serve you with more ardor and fidelity than ever."

As for Bussy, who was neither prince nor husband, two social positions in which dissimulation is absolutely necessary, a cold perspiration bathed his temples; he did not dare to look at Diane.

To see the treasure he had twice lost so near its owner made him feel sick.

"And you, M. de Bussy, who have come with his highness, will do me the favor to accept my sincerest thanks, for it is to you that I am almost wholly indebted for my life."

"What! to me!" stammered the young man, believing that the count was mocking him.

"Undoubtedly, though, it is true, indirectly; but my gratitude is not lessened by that. Ah! here is my saviour," he added, pointing to Rémy, who lifted his hands to heaven in despair and would gladly have sunk into the bowels of the earth. "My friends may thank him for having me still with them."

And, despite the signals made by the poor doctor for him to keep silent, signals he mistook for hygienic cautions, he lauded in the strongest terms the care, skill, and zeal lavished on him by Le Haudouin.

The duke's face grew dark, and the look that Bussy fastened on Rémy was terrible.

The poor fellow, half hidden behind Monsoreau, only answered with a gesture which meant:

"Alas! it is not my fault."

"By the way," continued the count, "I understand that Rémy found you dying on a certain day just as he found me. It is a bond of friendship between us, and you may rely on mine, M. de Bussy. When Monsoreau loves, he loves in good earnest; it is true that his hate is somewhat like his love, for when he hates, he hates heartily also."

Bussy thought he noticed that the flash that shot from the count's inflamed eyes, while uttering the last sentence, was aimed at the Duc d'Anjou.

The duke saw nothing.

"Come, then," said he, alighting from his horse and offering his hand to Diane, "have the goodness to do us the honors of your house, which we expected to find in mourning, but which, fortunately, continues to be the abode of happiness and bliss. As for you Monsoreau, rest; rest is absolutely necessary to the wounded."

"Monseigneur," said the count, "it shall never be said that while Monsoreau was alive he allowed any one but himself to do the honors of his house to your highness. My servants will carry me, and, wherever you go, I shall follow."

It really looked as if the duke had discovered the real thoughts of Monsoreau, for he suddenly dropped Diane's hand.

Then Monsoreau breathed freely.

"Go up to her," whispered Rémy in Bussy's ear.

Bussy approached Diane, and Monsoreau smiled on them both. Bussy took Diane's hand, and Monsoreau smiled again.

"This is a change indeed, M. le Comte," said Diane, in an undertone.

"Alas!" murmured Bussy, "why is it not greater?"

It is needless to state that the baron displayed all the pomp of his patriarchal hospitality toward the prince and the gentlemen who attended him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF LITTERS THAT ARE TOO WIDE AND DOORS THAT ARE TOO NARROW.

Bussy remained by Diane's side; Monsoreau's benevolent smiles gave him an advantage which he was the last person in the world not to turn to account.

As jealous husbands are not sparing of hard knocks in defence of their property, they are not spared, either, when once the poachers get a foothold on their lands.

"Madame," said Bussy to Diane, "I am, in truth, the most miserable of men. On the news of his death I advised the prince to come to terms with his mother and return to Paris; he consented, and now you remain in Anjou."

"Oh! Louis," answered the young woman, smiling as she took his hand in her slender fingers, "how dare you say we are unfortunate? Do you forget all our happy days, all the ineffable delights the memory of which thrills my heart with ecstasy; do you forget them, then?"

"I forget nothing, madame; on the contrary, I only remember them too well, and that is why the loss of such bliss causes me such pangs. Think of it, madame! to return to Paris and live three hundred miles away from you! My heart is breaking, Diane, and I feel utterly forlorn."

Diane looked at Bussy; she saw such sorrow in his eyes that she dropped hers and began to reflect.

The young man waited a moment, gazing at her imploringly and with his hands clasped in entreaty.

"Well!" cried Diane, suddenly; "you will go to Paris, Louis, and I intend going also."

"What!" exclaimed the young man, "leave M. de Monsoreau!"

"Though I should leave him," answered Diane, "he would not leave me. No, Louis, believe me, it is much better he should come with us."

"Wounded, ill as he is; impossible!"

"He will come, I tell you."

And dropping Bussy's arm, she approached the prince; he was answering some questions of Monsoreau in a very surly manner; Ribeirac, Antraguet, and Livarot were with him and standing round the litter.

At sight of Diane, the count's face brightened; but his cheerfulness did not last long; it passed as rapidly as a gleam of sunshine between two storms.

When Diane came up close to the duke, the count frowned.

"Monseigneur," said she, with a charming smile, "I am told your highness is passionately fond of flowers. If you come with me I will show you the loveliest flowers in all Anjou."

François gallantly offered her his arm.

"Where are you taking his highness, madame?" asked Monsoreau, uneasily.

"Into the greenhouse, monsieur."

"Ah!" cried Monsoreau. "Well, take me into the greenhouse, too."

"Egad!" said Rémy. "I think I did right not to kill him. God be thanked! He 's sure to kill himself without help."

Diane smiled on Bussy in a way that promised wonders.

"Don't let M. de Monsoreau suspect," said she, in a whisper, "that you are going away from Anjou; leave the rest to me."

"As you wish," answered Bussy.

And he went up to the prince, just as the litter of Monsoreau was turning round a clump of trees.

"Monseigneur," said he, "be careful; be particularly on your guard not to let Monsoreau know we are on the point of coming to terms."

"Why?"

"Because he would, very likely, inform the queen mother of

our real intentions, with the view of making her his friend; and you may be pretty sure, if Madame Catharine is aware of our plans she won't be at all as generous in our regard as she is at present."

"You are right," said the duke. "So you distrust him?"

"Distrust Monsoreau? Well! what a question!"

"Well, so do I. In fact, I believe that he gave out the report of his death to humbug us."

"Oh, no, I assure you! Saint-Luc made a hole in him, beyond a doubt. That idiot Rémy, who brought him to life, was quite certain at first that he was dead. In fact, he must have as many lives as a cat."

They were in front of the greenhouse.

Diane smiled on the duke more charmingly than ever.

The prince was the first to enter, then Diane. Monsoreau wished to follow; but, when his litter came to the threshold, it was evident it could not go in. The door was constructed in the ogival fashion, was long and high, but not wider than a good-sized trunk. Now, M. de Monsoreau's litter was six feet in width.

When the count perceived that the door was too narrow to admit his litter, he groaned.

Diane entered the greenhouse, utterly unmoved by the violent gestures of her husband.

Bussy, who was accustomed to read the young woman's heart through her eyes, understood perfectly the meaning of her smiles. He remained beside Monsoreau, and said, with perfect coolness:

"It's no use trying, M. le Comte; the door is too narrow, and you can never pass through it."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!" cried Monsoreau, "do not enter that greenhouse; the exhalations from some of the plants are deadly, the perfumes of certain foreign flowers are poisonous. Monseigneur! monseigneur!"

But François was not listening; he forgot his customary prudence in his delight at feeling Diane's hand in his, and was soon lost in the flowery windings of the conservatory.

Bussy did his best to calm the impatience of Monsoreau; but, notwithstanding his well-meant efforts, what might have been expected to happen happened; Monsoreau had an iron constitution, and could bear physical pain easily; but his mental agony got the better of him.

He fainted.

Rémy resumed all his authority over him; he ordered the wounded man to be carried to his bedroom.

"What am I to do now?" he asked Bussy.

"Oh, finish the task you began so well," answered the count; "stay with him and cure him."

Then he informed Diane of the accident that had happened to her husband.

Diane immediately left the duke and proceeded to the castle.

"Have we succeeded?" inquired Bussy, when she came near him.

"I think so," she answered; "in any case, do not go before you have seen Gertrude."

The duke's fondness for flowers only lasted as long as Diane was there to show them to him; when she went away, he recollected Monsoreau's warnings and hurried out of the building.

Ribeirac, Antraguet, and Livarot followed him.

Meanwhile Diane had joined her husband. Rémy was holding a vial of smelling-salts to his nose, and the count soon opened his eyes.

His first impulse was to rise up violently; Rémy, however, had foreseen the movement and held him firmly on the bed.

He uttered a groan of despair, but, looking round, he perceived Diane standing by his pillow.

"Ah! it is you, madame," said he; "I am very glad to see you, as I wanted to tell you that we start for Paris to-night."

Rémy protested loudly, but Monsoreau paid as little attention to Rémy as if he had not been there at all.

"Surely you are not thinking of such a journey, monsieur?" answered Diane, with her usual calmness, "and your wound!"

"Madame," said the count, "the wound does not matter; I would rather die on the roadside than suffer what I am suffering; so we leave here to-night."

"Very well, monsieur; just as you please," replied Diane.

"This pleases me, then; have the goodness to make your preparations for the journey."

"My preparations are soon made, monsieur; but may I ask what is the cause of this sudden resolution?"

"I will tell you, madame, when you have no more flowers to show the prince and when I have doors wide enough to allow litters to pass through them."

Diane bowed.

"But, madame" — said Rémy.

"M. le Comte wishes it," she answered, "and my duty is to obey."

And Rémy thought he noticed that the young woman made a sign to him to raise no further objections.

He kept silent, then, though not without grumbling.

"They 'll kill him as sure as fate," said he, "and then say it was the medicine that did the job!"

During this time the Duc d'Anjou was getting ready to leave Méridor.

He expressed, in the strongest terms, his gratitude to the baron for the reception that had been given him.

Just as he was mounting his horse, Gertrude made her appearance. She was sent, she said, to assure the duke that her mistress regretted very much she could not have the honor of bidding his highness adieu, but she was unable to leave her husband.

Then Gertrude whispered to Bussy that Diane was about to set out for Paris.

The prince and his attendants started for Angers.

François had all the whims and caprices natural to such a degenerate being.

If Diane had frowned upon him, he would not have cared particularly to remain in Anjou; but the smiles of Diane were a bait calculated to keep him in the province.

As he was in ignorance of the grand huntsman's resolution, he began to think, on his way back to the city, that perhaps he had been too hasty in complying with the wishes of the queen mother.

Bussy had foreseen this, and he had strong hopes that the duke would not quit Anjou.

"Listen, Bussy," said the prince, "I have been reflecting."

"On what, might I ask?" inquired the young man.

"That it is not wise to give in at once to my mother."

"You are right; she is vain enough already of her diplomatic successes without that."

"And then, you see, if we keep the matter open for a week, and have receptions and gather the nobles of the province round us, we 'll show our mother how strong we are."

"Admirably reasoned, monseigneur. Still, it seems to me that" —

"Oh, I will remain here a week; by doing so, I'm sure to wring fresh concessions from my mother, you may take my word for it."

Bussy appeared to be in deep thought.

"Of course, monseigneur, I should like to see you wring all the concessions you can from her. But yet you had better see to it that your position be not injured, instead of bettered, by this delay. The King might" —

"Well, what about the King?"

"The King, not being aware of your intentions, might get angry; it is not hard to anger the King."

"You are right; I must send some one to do homage to the King in my name and inform him of my approaching return; that will give me the week I need."

"Yes, but that 'some one' you speak of will run a great risk."

"In case I changed my resolution, eh?" said the prince, with his evil smile.

"Which, in spite of your promise to your brother, you will change, if your interests demand it. Is not that true?"

"Hum!" muttered the prince.

"And then your ambassador is pretty sure to be sent to the Bastile!"

"We'll give him a letter and not inform him of its contents."

"On the contrary, don't give him a letter, but tell him what he is to say."

"Why, if I did so, I could get nobody to undertake the mission!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"You are acquainted with a man that would do so?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with him."

"Who is he?"

"Myself, monseigneur!"

"You?"

"Yes, I am rather fond of difficult negotiations."

"Bussy, my dear Bussy," cried the duke, "if you do that, I shall be eternally grateful to you."

Bussy smiled. He had had some experience of the prince's eternal gratitude.

The duke thought he was hesitating.

"I will give you ten thousand crowns for the expenses of your journey," he added.

"Not necessary, monseigneur," said Bussy, "such things are not paid for. You are too noble-minded to think they can be, are you not?"

"Then you will start?"

"Yes."

"For Paris?"

"For Paris."

"And when?"

"Faith, whenever you wish."

"The sooner the better."

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, then?"

"To-night, if you wish."

"My brave Bussy! my dear Bussy! Then you really consent?"

"Of course I do. Why, monseigneur, you must be well aware by this time that I would go through fire and water to serve your highness. The thing is settled, then! But you will stay here and enjoy yourself; so you must get the queen mother to bestow some fat abbey or other on me."

"I have been thinking of doing so already."

"Then adieu, monseigneur."

"Adieu, Bussy — But do not forget one thing."

"What is it?"

"To take leave of my mother."

"I shall do myself that honor."

And Bussy, brisker and happier than a schoolboy when the bell has rung for recreation, paid his farewell visit to Catharine and then prepared to depart as soon as the signal should come from Méridor.

But the signal did not come until the next morning. The count was so enfeebled after the scenes through which he had passed that even he himself felt the need of a night's repose.

About seven, however, the same groom that had brought Saint-Luc's letter to Bussy came to him with the tidings that, in spite of the old baron's tears, and in spite of Rémy's remonstrances, the count had set out in a litter for Paris, escorted by Diane, Gertrude, and Rémy on horseback.

This litter was carried by eight men, who were relieved by others every three miles.

Bussy delayed no longer than to listen to the news; he jumped on a horse that had been saddled the previous evening and galloped along the road taken by Monsoreau.

CHAPTER LXXII.

HOW THE KING RECEIVED SAINT-LUC WHEN HE APPEARED AT COURT.

WHATEVER confidence the King may have had in the ambassador he had sent to Anjou, he was as zealous as ever in taking measures to meet the attacks of his brother.

He knew by experience what was the ruling passion in his family, and he knew, too, what he had to expect from a pretender to the crown, the very novelty of whose claims would give him an advantage over its legitimate but weary and effete possessor.

He found a sort of dismal amusement, somewhat after the fashion of Tiberius, in drawing up, with the aid of Chicot, long lists of proscriptions, in which were inscribed in alphabetical order all those whom he supposed unfriendly to the royal cause.

These lists grew longer every day.

And whenever the King came to an S and an L, his majesty was sure to write down the name of Saint-Luc, which thus appeared several times on his muster roll.

Moreover, the King's resentment was stimulated by the perfidious allusions and insinuations of the courtiers, and especially by their denunciations of Saint-Luc's flight to Anjou, a flight which became treasonable on the day when the duke, himself a fugitive, had started for that province.

In fact, should not Saint-Luc, after he had arrived at Méridor, be considered as simply the Duc d'Anjou's quartermaster, sent in advance of the prince to prepare lodgings for him at Angers?

In the midst of all this agitation and commotion, the way in which Chicot encouraged the minions to sharpen their rapiers and daggers, so as to have them in the best condition for stabbing and cutting down his most Christian Majesty's enemies, was a magnificent spectacle.

And the magnificence of the spectacle was not lessened by the fact that while the Gascon evidently wished it to be thought that he was simply the fly on the coach, he was really playing a far more serious part.

Little by little, and, so to speak, man by man, he was engaged all the time in enrolling an army for the King.

One afternoon when the King was supping with the Queen, whose society he sought frequently in times of political peril, Chicot entered suddenly, walking with arms and legs distended to the utmost, like a puppet on wires.

"Ugh!" said he.

"What?" asked the King.

"M. de Saint-Luc," answered Chicot.

"M. de Saint-Luc?" exclaimed Henri.

"Yes."

"In Paris?"

"Yes."

"In the Louvre?"

"Yes."

At this triple affirmation the King rose from the table, red and trembling. It would have been difficult to say by what emotions he was excited.

"Excuse me," he said to the Queen, as he wiped his mustache and flung his napkin on the chair, "but this is one of those state affairs which do not concern women."

"Yes," said Chicot, speaking in his loudest tone, "this is a state affair."

The Queen half rose from her seat, intending to leave the apartment.

"No, madame," said Henri, "oblige me by remaining. I am going into my cabinet."

"Oh! sire," said the Queen, in a voice denoting the tender interest she always took in her ungrateful husband, "I beseech you do not lose your temper."

"God forbid!" answered Henri, without noticing the air of mockery with which Chicot twisted his mustache.

Henri passed hastily out of the chamber, followed by Chicot. Once outside:

"What has he come to do here, the traitor?" asked Henri, in an agitated voice.

"Who knows?" answered Chicot.

"He comes as deputy from the States of Anjou. I am quite sure of that. He comes as ambassador from my brother, and naturally, too, considering what happens in all rebellions: they are troubled and muddy waters in which the disloyal always manage to fish with profit to themselves. It is true their profits are mean and sordid, but they ultimately turn to their advantage; for, however provisional and precarious they

are at first, they gradually become fixed and immutable. As soon as Saint-Luc got an inkling of the rebellion, he considered it gave him a chance of obtaining a safe-conduct and, therefore, an opportunity to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?" said Chicot.

The King stared for a moment at his curt companion.

"Perhaps, on the other hand," continued Henri, walking up and down the gallery with an irregular step that betrayed his agitation, "it may be that he comes to demand the restoration of his estates, the rents of which I am keeping in my own hands, — possibly a little arbitrary on my part, as, after all, he has committed no crime. Eh?"

"Who knows?" replied Chicot.

"Ah!" exclaimed Henri, "you are like my popinjay, always repeating the same thing. *Mort de ma vie!* You will drive me crazy in the end with your eternal 'Who knows?'"

"And, *mordieu!* do you think you are very amusing yourself with your eternal questions?"

"At least you might answer some of them."

"And what answer do you want? Do you take me, peradventure, for the Fatum of the ancients? Do you take me for Jupiter or Apollo or Manto? It is you, egad! that will drive me crazy with your idiotic suppositions."

"Monsieur Chicot" —

"Well, what next, Monsieur Henri?"

"Chicot, my friend, you see how afflicted I am and yet you jeer at me."

"Well, don't be afflicted, then, *mordieu!*"

"But everybody betrays me."

"Who knows, *ventre de biche!* who knows?"

Henri, lost in conjectures as to the motive for Saint-Luc's return, went down into his cabinet. There he found, already assembled, all the gentlemen who held official positions in the Louvre, and among them, or rather at their head, the dashing Crillon, with his fiery eyes, red nose, and bristling mustache. He looked not unlike a bulldog who was furious for a scuffle.

Saint-Luc was there also, standing coolly in the centre of these menacing faces; angry murmurs reached his ears, but he did not show the least sign of agitation.

Strange to say, his wife had come with him, and was seated on a stool close to the bed.

The husband, his hand firmly planted on the hip, returned

the insolent looks of those around him with looks fully as insolent as their own.

Through respect for the young woman, certain of the courtiers, who had a strong desire to jostle Saint-Luc, retired to a distance from him, and although it would have pleased them to address a few disagreeable words to him, they were silent. So it was in the void and silence made around him that the ex-favorite moved.

Jeanne, modestly muffled in her travelling mantle, was waiting, with eyes cast down.

Saint-Luc, haughtily draped in his cloak, was waiting, in an attitude that seemed to challenge hostility rather than to fear it.

On the other hand, the gentlemen present were waiting, perfectly ready to call Saint-Luc to account, and also anxious to find out what was his business in this court, where all who desired to share in the favor once enjoyed by him thought his appearance in it now decidedly uncalled for.

In fact, when the King appeared, it was the expectation of all the waiters that their waiting was to be followed by something important.

Henri entered, evidently very excited, and doing his best to add further intensity to his excitement; a manner that has been thought to give dignity to the deportment of princes.

He was followed by Chicot, who assumed that air of calmness and dignity a king of France ought to have assumed, and was evidently struck by the bearing of Saint-Luc in the way in which Henri III. ought at once to have been struck by it.

"Ha! so you are here?" cried the King, immediately on entering, taking no notice of those around him, in this resembling the bull in the Spanish arena, who sees in the thousands of men before him only a moving fog, and in the rainbow of banners a single color — red.

"Yes, sire," answered Saint-Luc, modestly and simply, as he made a respectful inclination.

So little effect had this response on the King's ear, so little successful was this calm and deferential behavior in communicating to his darkened mind those feelings of reason and mildness which the union of respect for others with the sense of personal dignity ought to excite, that the King went on, without pausing:

"Really, your presence in the Louvre is a strange surprise to me."

At this rude attack there was a deathlike silence around the King and his late favorite.

It was the silence that used to arise in the lists when it was known that the two adversaries must fight out their conflict to the bitter end.

Saint-Luc was the first to break it.

"Sire," said he, with his usual grace, and without seeming at all disturbed by this royal sally, "what surprises me is that, considering the circumstances in which you are placed, your Majesty did not expect me."

"What does that mean, monsieur?" answered Henri, with a pride that was altogether royal, and raising his face, which on great occasions assumed an expression of incomparable dignity.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "your Majesty is in great danger."

"In great danger!" cried the courtiers.

"Yes, gentlemen, this danger is very great and very real and very serious, a danger in which the King has need of the smallest as well as of the greatest of those devoted to him; and, with the firm conviction that, in such a danger as that to which I allude, no help is too feeble to be disregarded, I have come to lay at the feet of my King the offer of my humble services."

"Aha!" said Chicot, "you see, my son, I was right in saying: 'Who knows?'"

Henri did not reply at once. He looked round at his courtiers; they were evidently annoyed and offended; he soon gauged from their looks the jealousy that rankled in the hearts of most of them.

He concluded, therefore, that Saint-Luc had done something which the majority of the assembly were incapable of doing, that is to say, something disinterested.

However, he did not like to surrender all at once.

"Monsieur," he answered, "you have only done your duty; your services are due to us."

"The services of all the King's subjects are due to the King; I am aware of that, sire," replied Saint-Luc; "but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I, sire, have come to pay mine, happy if your Majesty be graciously pleased to always number me among your debtors."

Henri, disarmed by Saint-Luc's unalterable gentleness and humility, advanced a step toward him.

"So, then," said he, "you return from no other motive

except the one you mention? You have no mission or safe-conduct?"

"Sire," answered Saint-Luc, eagerly, for he knew from his master's tone that he was no longer angry or vindictive, "I have returned purely and simply for the sake of returning, and that, too, as fast as my horse could carry me. And now, your Majesty may throw me into the Bastile in an hour, and may have me shot in two; but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire; Touraine is on the point of revolting, and Guyenne is rising and will lend her a hand. M. le Duc d'Anjou is hard at work in the west and south of France."

"And he is well supported, is he not?" cried the King.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "neither advice nor argument can stay the duke; and even M. de Bussy, unmoved as he is himself, cannot inspire your brother with courage, so terrible is his dread of your Majesty."

"Ha! he trembles, then, the rebel!" said Henri, and he smiled under his mustache.

"Egad!" said Chicot to himself, rubbing his chin, "that Saint-Luc is wondrous clever!"

And elbowing the King out of the way:

"Stand aside, Henri," said he, "I want to shake hands with M. de Saint-Luc."

Chicot's movement won over the King entirely. He allowed the Gascon to pay his compliments to the newcomer; then, going slowly up to his former friend, he laid his hand on his shoulder and said:

"You are welcome, Saint-Luc."

"Ah, sire," cried Saint-Luc, kissing the King's hand, "I have found my beloved master again at last!"

"Yes, but I do not find you again, my poor Saint-Luc," returned the King; "you have grown so thin that, if I had met you in the street, I should not have recognized you."

At these words a feminine voice was heard.

"Sire," said this voice, "his grief at displeasing your Majesty is the cause of his thinness."

Although the voice was very soft and respectful, Henri started. It sounded as disagreeably in his ears as did the noise of thunder in the ears of Augustus.

"Madame de Saint-Luc!" he murmured. "Ah! — yes — I had forgotten" —

Jeanne flung herself on her knees.

"Rise, madame," said the King. "I love all who bear the name of Saint-Luc."

Jeanne seized the King's hand and raised it to her lips.

Henri withdrew it quickly.

"Go," said Chicot to the young woman. "Go and try to convert the King, *ventre de biche!* You are pretty enough to succeed!"

But Henri turned his back on Jeanne, and, throwing his arm around Saint-Luc's neck, proceeded with him to his apartments.

"So we have made peace, Saint-Luc?" said the King.

"Say rather, sire," answered the courtier, "that a pardon has been granted."

"Madame," whispered Chicot to Jeanne, who was uncertain what to do, "a good wife should not forsake her husband, especially when that husband is in danger."

And he pushed Jeanne after the King and Saint-Luc.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

IN WHICH ARE MET TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES WHOM THE READER HAS LOST SIGHT OF FOR SOME TIME.

THERE is one of the personages belonging to this history — nay, even two — about whose feats and achievements the reader has the right to demand information.

With all the humility of the author of a preface in past ages, we hasten to answer the reader's questions, for we are not blind to their importance.

The first question would naturally concern an enormous monk, with bushy eyebrows, lips red and fleshy, big hands, vast shoulders, and a neck that grows smaller every day, while the chest and cheeks gain in development what it loses.

The next question would concern a very large donkey, whose sides had grown so rotund that they now presented the graceful outlines of a balloon.

The monk will soon resemble a hogshead supported by two posts.

The ass already resembles a child's cradle resting on four distaffs.

The one is the tenant of a cell in the convent of Sainte Geneviève, where all the graces of the Lord come to visit him.

The other is a tenant in one of the stables of the same convent, where he lives within reach of a manger that is always full.

The one answers to the name of Gorenflot.

The other should answer to the name of Panurge.

Both, for the time at least, are in the enjoyment of the most prosperous lot ever dreamed of by ass or monk. The Genevievans are lavish of their attentions to their illustrious comrade, and like unto the divinities of the third order, whose care it used to be to wait upon Jupiter's eagle and Juno's peacock and Venus's doves, so the lay brothers make it their special concern to fatten Panurge in honor of his master.

The abbey kitchen smokes perpetually. The most renowned vineyards in Burgundy supply the vintage that is poured into the largest-sized glasses ever known.

Does a missionary arrive at the convent after propagating the faith in foreign lands, or a confidential legate from the Pope with indulgences granted by his holiness? Brother Gorenflot is at once placed on exhibition as a model of the church preaching as well as of the church militant, as one who handles the Word like Saint Luke and the sword like Saint Paul. Gorenflot is pointed out to them in all his glory, that is to say, in the midst of a feast, seated at a table wherein a hollow has been cut out for his sacred stomach, and the holy pilgrim is told with noble pride that their Gorenflot, without any assistance at all, engorges the rations of eight of the most robust appetites in the convent.

And when the visitor has piously contemplated this marvellous spectacle:

"What an admirably endowed nature is his!" says the prior, with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven. "Brother Gorenflot loves good cheer, and he also cultivates the arts; you see how he eats! Ah! if you could have heard the sermon he preached on a certain night, a sermon in which he offered to sacrifice his life for the triumph of the faith! Behold a mouth that speaks like that of Saint John Chrysostom, and swallows like that of Gargantua!"

Sometimes, however, it happens that in the midst of all these splendors a cloud settles on the brow of Gorenflot; the

fat pullets of Mans in vain exhale their delicious odors under his wide nostrils; in vain do the little oysters of Flanders — a thousand of which he has ingulped in mere sport — gape and wriggle in their pearly couches; the multiform bottles, though uncorked, remain intact; Gorenflot is gloomy; Gorenflot is not hungry; Gorenflot is pensive.

Then the report runs that the worthy Genevievan is in an ecstasy like Saint Francis, or in a swoon like Saint Teresa, and the admiration of his brethren for him is redoubled.

He is more than a monk, he is a saint; he is more than a saint, he is a demigod; some even say he is an entire god.

"Hush!" murmur his brethren; "disturb not the trance of Brother Gorenflot!"

And they respectfully retire.

The prior alone waits for the moment when Brother Gorenflot gives some faint sign of life; he then approaches the monk, takes his hand obsequiously, and addresses him deferentially. Gorenflot raises his head and looks at the prior with lack-lustre eyes.

He is coming back from another world.

"What were you doing, my worthy brother?" asks the prior.

"I?" answers Gorenflot.

"Yes, you; you were doing something."

"Yes, father prior, I was composing a sermon."

"Like the one you had the courage to deliver on the night of the Holy League?"

Every time this sermon is mentioned Gorenflot deplores his infirmity.

"Yes," said he, with a sigh, "like that one. But, ah! what a pity it is I did not write it down!"

"Does a man like you need to write, my dear brother?" would be the prior's answer. "No, he speaks by inspiration; he opens his mouth, and, as he is full of the Word of God, the Word of God flows from his lips."

"Do you think so?" murmurs Gorenflot.

"Happy the man whose humility makes him doubt of his gifts," replies the prior.

And, in fact, Gorenflot, who comprehends the necessities of the situation and what his antecedents naturally lead others to expect from him, occasionally thinks of composing a sermon.

Yes, Gorenflot is going to play the very mischief with Marcus Tullius and Cæsar and Saint Gregory and Saint

Augustine and Saint Jerome and Tertullian, for sacred eloquence is about to be renewed by the illustrious Genevievan. *Rerum novus ordo nascitur.*

From time to time also, at the end of a repast, or even in the middle of his ecstasies, Gorenflot would rise, and, as if pushed on by some invisible arm, would go straight to the stable; after entering, he looked fondly at Panurge, who brayed with pleasure; then he passed his heavy hand over the animal's sides, his big fingers disappearing in the superabundant hair. This was more than pleasure for Panurge; it was bliss, and, not content with braying, he rolled over in his delight.

The prior and three or four dignitaries of the convent usually attended him in these excursions, and must have rather bored Panurge with their platitudes. But, on the other hand, they offered him cakes, biscuits, and macaroons, as those who desired to win Pluto's favor in days of yore were in the habit of offering honey cakes to his dog Cerberus.

Panurge makes no objection; he is of a rather good-natured disposition; besides, having no ecstasies, having no sermon to compose, and having no reputation to support except his reputation for obstinacy, idleness, and luxury, he finds that none of his desires is left ungratified and that he is the happiest ass in the world.

The prior looks at him with emotion.

"Simplicity and gentleness," says he, "are the virtues of the strong."

Gorenflot has discovered that *ita* in Latin corresponds to *yes;* this discovery has been of marvellous service to him, and to every question he generally answers: *ita,* with a self-complacency that never fails to be effective.

The abbot, encouraged by finding him so constantly acquiescent, will sometimes say:

"You work too hard, my dear brother, and this accounts for your occasional dejection."

And Gorenflot's response to Messire Joseph Foulon is like that made sometimes to Henri III. by Chicot:

"Who knows?"

"Perhaps," adds the prior, "our repasts are too coarse for your taste; would you like me to change the brother cook? As you well know, dear brother, *Quaedam saturationes minus succedunt.*"

"*Ita*," is the eternal answer of Gorenflot, made without ever interrupting the caresses he lavishes on his ass.

"You show extraordinary fondness for your Panurge, my brother," says the prior, sometimes; "perhaps a desire to travel has again taken possession of your soul."

To which Gorenflot's answer would be an "oh!" and a sigh.

The fact is that it is the memory of his travels that tortures Gorenflot; for Gorenflot, who had at first looked on his removal from the convent as a terrible misfortune, had discovered during his exile certain infinite and unknown delights that have their source in liberty.

Amid all his happiness, this longing for freedom was like a worm gnawing at the heart; freedom with Chicot, the jolly comrade; with Chicot, whom he loved without well knowing why; perhaps it was because he was now and then beaten by him.

"Alas!" timidly observed a young brother, after a careful study of the monk's physiognomy, "I am afraid you are right, honored prior, and that the reverend father finds his stay in our convent wearisome."

"No, that is hardly correct," answered Gorenflot; "but I feel I was born for a life of struggle, destined to hold forth in the interests of the church at the cross-roads and in the suburbs."

While saying these words, the eyes of Gorenflot brighten; he is thinking of the omelets he had eaten with Chicot, of Maître Claude Bonhomet's Anjou wine, and of the low-roofed hall in the *Corne d'Abondance*.

Ever since the evening of the League, or rather, ever since the morning he returned to his convent, he has not been allowed to go out; for, after the King appointed himself chief of the Union, the Leaguers became exceedingly prudent.

And then, Gorenflot is so simple-minded that he never even thought of taking advantage of his lofty position and ordering the gates to be thrown open.

He was told that no one was allowed to go out, and so he did not go out.

And none of his brethren had the slightest suspicion of the real reason why his abode in the convent was so irksome to him.

At last the prior, seeing he was becoming sadder and sadder every day, said to him one morning:

"My dear brother, no one ought to resist his vocation, yours is to combat for Christ; go, then, fulfil the mission confided to you by the Lord; but guard your precious life carefully, and return for the great day."

"What great day?" asked Gorenflot, forgetting in his joy what he was expected to know.

"That of Corpus Christi."

"*Ita*," said the monk, with an air of deep sagacity; "but," added Gorenflot, "give me some money, so that by bestowing it in alms, I may be inspired to fulfil my task in a truly Christian spirit."

The prior went hastily for a large wallet, which he opened and held before Gorenflot, who plunged his huge hand deep in it.

"You will see what I shall bring back with me to the convent," said he, as he stuffed the money he had just borrowed from the prior's wallet into the big pocket in his robe.

"You have your text, have you not, my dear brother?" inquired Joseph Foulon.

"Yes, certainly."

"Confide it to me."

"With pleasure; but to you alone."

The prior drew near to Gorenflot and lent an attentive ear.

"Listen."

"I am listening."

"'The flail that thrashes the corn thrashes itself.'"

"Magnificent! Sublime!" cried the prior.

And the other monks present sincerely shared the enthusiasm of Messire Joseph Foulon, and repeated after him:

"Magnificent! Sublime!"

"And am I now free, father?" asked Gorenflot, humbly.

"Yes, my son," answered the reverend abbot, "go and walk in the path of the Lord."

Gorenflot, thereupon, had Panurge saddled, succeeded in bestriding him, with the aid of two vigorous monks, and sallied forth from the convent about seven in the evening.

It was on the same day that Saint-Luc arrived from Méridor, bringing news that created the utmost excitement in Paris.

Gorenflot, after following the Rue Saint-Étienne, turned to the right and passed the Jacobin convent, when suddenly Panurge started; he had just felt the pressure of a heavy hand on his crupper.

"Who goes there?" cried Gorenflot, in terror.

"A friend," answered a voice he thought he recognized.

Gorenflot longed to turn round, but, like those sailors who, every time they go aboard find it takes time to enable them to adjust their gait to the rolling of the vessel, whenever the monk mounted his ass anew he found it also took some time to master his centre of gravity.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Would you have the goodness, worthy brother," replied the voice, "to show me the way to the *Corne d'Abondance?*"

"*Morbleu!*" exclaimed Gorenflot, joyfully, "it is M. Chicot in person."

"Perfectly correct," answered the Gascon. "I was going to the convent for you, my dear brother, when I saw you outside of it. I have followed you for some time, afraid that, if I spoke to you, it might compromise your character. But, now that we are quite alone, how goes it, you rogue? *Ventre de biche!* you have grown thin!"

"And you, M. Chicot, have grown fat, you may take my word for it."

"I think both of us are a little inclined to flatter each other."

"But what is the matter with you, M. Chicot?" said the monk; "you appear to be carrying something heavy."

"A quarter of venison I stole from his Majesty," said the Gascon. "We 'll broil a few steaks off it."

"Dear M. Chicot!" cried the monk; "and under the other arm?"

"A bottle of Cyprus wine sent by a king to my King."

"Let us have a look at it," said Gorenflot.

"It is my favorite wine; I am very fond of it," said Chicot, drawing aside his cloak; "are not you also, my good brother?"

"Oh! oh!" was all the monk could say when he perceived this double godsend, and he gave such a jump in his saddle that Panurge bent under him, "oh! oh!"

In his joy the monk raised his arms to heaven, and in a voice that shook the windows in the houses on each side of him, he sang the following song, in which he was accompanied by Panurge:

"Music has charms beyond compare,
But charms that through our ears regale us.
Flowers have odors rich and rare.
But, when we 're hungry, perfumes fail us,

A blue, clear sky is pleasant to see,
When no black cloud comes marring our pleasure.
Still, wine that down the throat runs free
Has joys superior beyond measure.
It smells as sweet as any flower;
You touch and taste and drink it gladly,
'T is brighter than skies that sometimes lower.
No wonder that I love it madly!"

It was the first time that Gorenflot had sung for nearly a whole month.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW BUSSY PURSUED A PARTY OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES BY RIDING IN FRONT OF THEM.

Let us allow the two friends to enter the hostelry of the *Corne d'Abondance*, where, it will be remembered, Chicot never brought Gorenflot without some design or other the importance of which the monk was far from suspecting, and let us return to M. de Monsoreau, as he follows the highway from Méridor to Paris in his litter, and to Bussy also, who started from Angers with the intention of pursuing the same route.

It is not difficult for a well-mounted horseman to overtake travellers on foot, but still he runs a certain risk, — he may pass them on the way.

Now this is just what happened to Bussy.

It was the end of May, and the heat was excessive, especially about noon.

For this reason, M. de Monsoreau ordered his bearers to enter a little wood near the road and stop there for a time. He was also desirous that his departure should be known to the Duc d'Anjou at as late a period as possible. Therefore, both to escape observation from some unfriendly passer-by, and to avoid the sultriness that prevailed at the time, he directed his attendants to proceed to the most sheltered part of the grove; and, as they had a horse laden with provisions, a collation could be prepared without much trouble.

During this time Bussy passed them.

But Bussy had not travelled far, as may easily be imagined, without inquiring whether a party of horsemen and a litter carried by peasants had been seen.

On the way to the village of Durtal he had received information of the most positive and satisfactory nature. Convinced, therefore, that Diane was only a little in advance of him, he had ridden on slowly, standing in his stirrups, whenever he came to an elevation, to get a glimpse of those he was in the wake of.

But suddenly, and contrary to his expectation, all traces of them disappeared; the travellers he chanced to come across told him they had seen nobody, and, as soon as he reached the first houses in La Flèche, he became convinced that, instead of being behind, he was in advance, — that he was ahead of them instead of being in the rear of them.

Then he remembered the little wood and discovered the reason why his horse had neighed several times when going by it.

He came to a resolution, and acted on it at once; he took up his quarters in the worst inn in the street. After seeing that his horse was taken care of, for he was more anxious about the beast's comfort than about his own, especially as he might have to rely on his strength before long, he took his station behind the linen rag that did duty for a curtain on the window of his room.

Bussy's choice of this low tavern as a temporary resting-place was determined by the fact that it was opposite the principal hotel in the town, at which he was pretty certain of Monsoreau stopping.

Bussy's anticipation turned out correct. About four in the afternoon a courier arrived and halted in front of the hostelry.

Half an hour later came the whole party. It consisted of the count and countess, Gertrude and Rémy, and of eight bearers who had taken the place of eight other bearers about nine miles from the village.

The courier's business was to recruit peasants for these relays.

Now, as Monsoreau was too jealous not to be liberal, he found no difficulty in travelling in this rather singular fashion.

The principal persons of the company entered the hotel, one after the other. Diane was the last to go in, and Bussy fancied that she looked anxiously around. His first impulse was to show himself, but he had the courage to check it; any imprudent act on his part might ruin them.

Night came on. Bussy hoped that, after it was dark, Rémy

might come out or Gertrude appear at a window. He wrapped his cloak about him and mounted guard in the street.

He waited till nine; at nine the courier left the hotel.

Five minutes later eight men approached the door and four of them entered.

"I wonder," thought Bussy, "will they travel by night. If M. de Monsoreau take such an idea into his head, it will please me well."

Everything, in fact, showed the probability of the party doing so. It was a mild night and the sky was lit up by innumerable stars. One of those soft breezes that seem the very breathings of a rejuvenated earth swept through the balmy air, caressing everything it touched.

The litter passed out first.

Then came Diane, Rémy, and Gertrude on horseback.

Diane gazed eagerly around her; but the count summoned her and she had to ride beside the litter.

Four of the peasants lit torches and marched in twos on each side of this litter.

"Good," said Bussy. "If I had the arrangement of the journey myself I could not have managed things better."

And he returned to the tavern, saddled his horse, and followed the party.

This time he could neither mistake the road nor lose sight of them: the torches showed the way clearly.

Monsoreau scarcely allowed Diane to move from his side.

He talked with her, or rather scolded her.

The visit to the greenhouse served as a text for endless commentaries and for a crowd of venomous questions.

Rémy and Gertrude were both out of temper, or, to speak more correctly, Rémy was in a brown study and Gertrude was out of temper with Rémy.

The cause of her ill-humor could be easily explained: now that Diane was in love with Bussy, Rémy no longer saw any reason why he should be in love with Gertrude.

The party, then, moved along, some quarrelling, others sulking, when Bussy, who had for a time lost sight of the cavalcade, warned Rémy of his presence by a whistle. For this purpose he used a silver whistle which served his turn when he had to summon his servants in the hotel in the Rue de Grenelle Saint-Honoré.

It had a shrill, vibrating sound, which could be heard in any part of the mansion and its appurtenances.

Men and beasts ran up when they heard it.

We say men and beasts, for Bussy, like all strong natures, took great pleasure in training bellicose dogs, refractory horses, and wild falcons.

Now, whenever he blew this whistle, the dogs would start in their kennels, the horses in their stables, and the falcons on their perches.

Rémy recognized it at once. Diane was troubled, and looked at the young man, who made an affirmative sign.

Then he rode round to the left and said, in an undertone:

"It is he."

"What is the matter?" asked Monsoreau, "and who is speaking to you, madame?"

"To me, monsieur? Nobody."

"Oh, yes, there is. I saw a shadow near you, and I heard a voice."

"The voice was M. Rémy's; are you jealous also of M. Rémy?"

"No, but I like those around me to speak aloud; it diverts my attention."

"There are some things, however, which it would be as well M. le Comte should not hear," said Gertrude, coming to the rescue of her mistress.

"Why so?"

"For two reasons."

"What are they?"

"The first reason is that what is said might not interest M. le Comte; the second is that it might interest him too much."

"And to which class belong the things said to madame by M. Rémy?"

"To the class of things that might interest M. le Comte too much."

"What was Rémy saying to you, madame? I insist on knowing."

"I was saying, monsieur, that if you go on as you are doing, you'll be dead before we have gone a third of the journey."

The face of Monsoreau, seen in the sinister glare of the torches, became as pale as that of a corpse.

Diane was pensive and agitated, but silent.

"He is behind," said Rémy to Diane, in a voice scarcely intelligible. "Ride more slowly and he will come up with you."

Rémy had spoken so low that Monsoreau heard only a murmur. With a great effort he turned his head round and saw that Diane was following him.

"Another movement like that, M. le Comte," said Rémy, "and you are sure to have a return of your hæmorrhage."

Diane had now grown very courageous. From her love had sprung that audacity which, in every woman truly enamoured, ordinarily transcends reasonable limits. She turned back and waited.

At the same moment Rémy alighted, gave the reins to Gertrude to hold, and approached the litter with the view of distracting the count's attention.

"Let me feel your pulse," said he, "I would wager we are feverish."

Five minutes after, Bussy was by her side.

They had no need of speech to understand each other; for some moments they were locked in a tender embrace.

The first to break silence was Bussy. "You see," said he, "that where you go I follow."

"Oh! how beautiful will be my days, Bussy, how sweet my nights, if I know you are ever thus near me!"

"But by day he will see us."

"No, you will follow us from afar, and I alone will see you, my Louis. At the turn of some road, from the summit of some hill, the plume in your hat, the embroidery on your cloak, the fluttering of your handkerchief, will all speak in your name, will tell me I am loved. When the sun is declining, when azure mists are floating over the plain, let me but see your dear and ghostlike form gently bend as you waft to me the sweet kiss of eventide, and I shall be happy, oh! so happy!"

"Speak on, speak ever, beloved Diane, you are yourself unaware of all the music your sweet voice holds."

"And when we march by night, which we shall often do, for Rémy has told him the coolness of evening is good for his wounds; then as now, from time to time, I will stay behind, from time to time I shall be able to clasp you in my arms and to tell you, in a quick pressure of the hand, all that I shall have thought of you during the day."

"Oh! how I love you! how I love you!" murmured Bussy.

"Do you know," said Diane, "I believe our souls are so closely united that, though far apart, though never seeing each other, never speaking with each other, we can be happy in our thoughts."

"Yes! yes! but to see you, to hold you in my arms,—oh! Diane! Diane!"

And the horses came close together and disported themselves as they shook their silver bridles, and the two lovers forgot the world in a lingering embrace.

Suddenly was heard a voice that made both tremble, Diane with fear, Bussy with rage.

"Madame Diane," it cried, "where are you? Madame Diane, answer."

This cry pierced the air like some funereal shriek.

"Oh! 't is he! 't is he! I had forgotten him," murmured Diane. "It is he. I have been dreaming! Oh, sweet dream! Oh, horrible awaking!"

"Listen," cried Bussy, "listen, Diane, we are now together. Say but the word and nothing can ever separate us again. Diane, let us fly. What can prevent us from flying? Look: before us are space, happiness, liberty! A word, and we are gone, a word, and lost to him, you belong to me for eternity."

And the young man gently held her back.

"And my father?" said Diane.

"But when the baron knows how I love you," he murmured.

"Ah! he is a father," said Diane. "How does a father feel when his daughter acts as you would have me act?"

These words recalled Bussy to himself.

"I will not force you, my darling," said he; "order, and I obey."

"Listen," answered Diane, offering him her hand, "our destiny is yonder. Let us be stronger than the demon who persecutes us. Fear nothing and you shall see if I know how to love."

"Great heavens! and must we, then, part?" murmured Bussy.

"Countess! countess!" cried Monsoreau, "answer, or, though I kill myself, I will leap from this infernal litter."

"Adieu, Bussy, adieu," said Diane; "he would do as he says: he would kill himself."

"You pity him?"

"Jealous!" said Diane, in her charming voice and with her adorable smile.

And Bussy let her go.

In a moment she was at the litter; the count was almost unconscious.

"Stop!" he murmured, "stop!"

"*Morbleu!*" said Rémy, "do not stop! he is mad; if he want to kill himself, he can do so."

And the litter continued its course.

"But whom are you calling to?" cried Gertrude; "my lady is by my side. Pray, answer him, madame; I 'm afraid M. le Comte is delirious."

Diane uttered not a word, but at once entered the space lit up by the torches.

"Ah!" said Monsoreau, feebly, "where were you?"

"Where should I be if not behind you, monsieur?"

"Beside me, madame, beside me; do not leave me."

Diane had no further reason for staying in the rear; she knew that Bussy was following her. If there had been moonlight, she could have seen him.

At last they came to the stopping-place.

After a few hours' rest, Monsoreau started again.

He was in a hurry, not to reach Paris, but to get away as far as possible from Angers.

The scenes we have just related were renewed at intervals.

Rémy said to himself:

"If rage should choke him, the physician's honor is saved."

But Monsoreau did not die. On the contrary, when he arrived in Paris, after a ten days' journey, there was a sensible improvement in his condition.

Rémy was a wonderfully skilful doctor, far more skilful than he would have wished in the present case.

During these ten days Diane had conquered all Bussy's pride by means of the tenderness she lavished on him.

She had persuaded him to visit Monsoreau and turn the latter's friendship for him to their mutual advantage.

The health of the count would afford a pretext for numerous visits.

Rémy took care of the husband and brought his master love-letters from the wife.

"Æsculapius and Mercury," said he. "I am beginning to hold more offices than one."

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE ARRIVAL OF M. D'ANJOU'S AMBASSADOR AT THE LOUVRE AND HIS RECEPTION THEREIN.

However, neither Catharine nor the Duc d'Anjou reappeared at the Louvre, and the reports of dissensions between the brothers increased every day in extent and importance.

The King had received no message from his mother, and, instead of concluding according to the proverb: "No news is good news," he said, on the contrary, with a shake of the head: "No news is bad news."

The minions added:

"*François, badly advised*, has detained your mother."

"*François, badly advised.*" In fact, the whole policy of this singular reign and of the three preceding reigns might be reduced to these two words: badly advised.

Charles IX. had been badly advised when he authorized the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, if he did not actually sign an edict in its favor. François I. had been badly advised when he ordered the massacre of Amboise.

Henri II., the father of a perverse race, had been badly advised when he burned so many heretics and conspirators, before being killed by Montgomery, and the latter, too, it was said, was badly advised when he allowed the shaft of his lance to penetrate the visor of the King's helmet.

No one ventured to say to a king:

"Your brother has bad blood in his veins; acting according to the traditions of your family, he is trying to dethrone, tonsure, or poison you. He wishes to do to you what you did to your eldest brother, what your eldest brother did to his, what your mother taught you to do to one another."

No, a king at that period, a king of the sixteenth century, would have taken such remarks as insults; for a king was then a man; it is civilization alone that has made him a facsimile of God, like Louis XIV., or an irresponsible myth, like a constitutional king.

The minions said to Henri III., then:

"Sire, your brother is badly advised."

Now, as Bussy alone had the power and capacity to advise

François, a storm was raised against Bussy that grew more furious every day, until it threatened to burst over his head.

There were public councils held to discuss the best method of intimidating the King's enemies, and private councils held to discuss the best method of exterminating them, when, at length, tidings came of the arrival of an ambassador from the Duc d'Anjou.

How did these tidings come? Who brought them? Who spread them?

It would be as easy to account for the tempestuous whirlwinds in the air, or the sandy whirlwinds on the plains, or the noisy whirlwinds in the streets.

There is a demon that attaches wings to certain rumors, and then sends them flying like eagles into space.

When the rumor of which we have spoken came flying into the Louvre the excitement was indescribable.

The King turned pale with anger, and the courtiers, as is usual with courtiers, aping the passion of their master in an exaggerated degree, turned livid.

They swore.

It would be difficult to repeat all the oaths they swore; but, among other things, they swore these:

If the ambassador were an old man, he should be hooted, scouted, fettered.

If he were a young man, he should be cloven in twain, bored through and through, cut into small pieces, which pieces should be distributed among the provinces of France as samples of the royal anger.

And the minions, according to their custom, began whetting their rapiers, taking lessons in fencing and practising against the walls with their daggers. But Chicot neither drew his sword from its scabbard nor his poniard from its sheath; on the contrary, he gave himself up to profound reflection.

And the King, seeing that Chicot was reflecting, remembered that, during a certain crisis, Chicot had been of the opinion of the queen mother, and that their joint opinion had been verified by events.

So the King saw that in Chicot was embodied the wisdom of his kingdom, and he questioned him on the subject under discussion.

"Sire," replied the Gascon, after long deliberation, "either the Duc d'Anjou sends you an ambassador or he does not."

"By my faith," said the King. "it was hardly worth while for you to make a hollow in your cheek with your fist in order to discover that fine dilemma."

"Patience, patience, as your august mother, whom God preserve, is in the habit of saying in Machiavelli's tongue; patience."

"Anybody can see that I have enough of that, since I am willing to hear you," retorted the King.

"If he send you an ambassador, it is because he believes he can do so; if he believe he can do so, it is because he feels he is strong; if he feel he is strong, we must walk warily. Respect the powerful, do your best to overreach them, but do not slight them. Always receive their ambassadors, and always show that you are delighted to receive them. That binds you to nothing. Do you remember how your brother embraced that simple Admiral Coligny, sent to him as ambassador by the Huguenots, who also believed that they were very powerful people?"

"Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles?"

"No, no; let us understand each other. I quote a case in point, and I add: Do not harm a poor herald, clerk, or envoy, or ambassador. But rather, let us see if we cannot discover, later on, some way of nabbing the master, the mover, the leader, the most high and mighty prince, Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, the genuine, sole, and only culprit, and, of course, also the three Guises. Oh! sire, if we can then clap them into some securer hold than the Louvre, by all means let us do it."

"I rather like your suggestion," said Henri.

"Odsfish! it does n't irritate you, then? Well, I 'll go on."

"Go on."

"But in case he does n't send an ambassador, you must stop your friends from bellowing."

"Bellowing!"

"You understand; I would say 'roaring,' if any one were likely to take them for lions. I say 'bellowing' because — hold on, Henri — it really turns my stomach to look on while the young bucks, with about as much hair on their chins as on those of the monkeys in your menagerie, are playing at the game of ghosts like little brats of boys, and trying to frighten men by screaming: 'wow! wow!' If the Duc d'Anjou should send no ambassador, they 're sure to fancy it

was because he was afraid of them, and there will be no standing them."

"Chicot, you seem to forget that the persons you speak of are my friends, my only friends."

"Wouldst wish me to win a thousand crowns, O my King?" answered Chicot.

"Speak."

"Bet with me that those fellows will remain faithful in spite of every temptation, and I will bet that before to-morrow I shall have won three out of the four of them over to myself and away from you, won them body and soul."

Chicot spoke with so much assurance that Henri did not reply. He reflected.

"Ah!" said Chicot; "so it 's your time for reflecting now, and you make a hollow in your charming little jaw with your charming little fist also. You have more sense, after all, than I have been in the habit of crediting you with, for you have an inkling of the truth, my son."

"Then what do you advise?"

"To wait, great King. The half of Solomon's wisdom lies in that word. If an ambassador come, bid him welcome; if no one come, do as you like. But as for your brother, if you take my advice, you will not allow him to be torn in pieces by your scapegraces. *Cordieu!* he 's a great blackguard himself; I know that well, but he is a Valois. Kill him if you find it to your interest; but, for the honor of your name, do not degrade him. He does that himself with wonderful ingenuity and without any one's help."

"It 's true, Chicot."

"One more lesson for which you are my debtor. Luckily for you, we have given up counting. Now let me sleep, Henri. A week ago I had for certain excellent reasons to send a monk under the table, and whenever I accomplish one of these noble achievements I have to keep half seas over myself for a week afterward."

"A monk! The worthy Genevievan you spoke about lately?"

"Correct. By the way, you promised him an abbey."

"I?"

"Of course, you. It 's the least you could do for him after all he has done for you."

"He is, then, still devoted to me?"

"He adores you. And by the way again, my son" —

"Well?"

"Corpus Christi will come in three weeks."

"And supposing it does?"

"I hope you are paving the way for some pretty little procession for us."

"I am the most Christian King, and it is my duty to set my people a religious example."

"And you will, as usual, do the stations in the four great convents of Paris?"

"As usual."

"The Abbey of Sainte Geneviève is one of them, is it not?"

"Undoubtedly; it is the second one I intend visiting."

"Good."

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, for no reason at all. I was simply curious. Now I know what I wanted to know. Good-night, Henri."

But just as Chicot was making his preparations for a good sound nap, a great uproar was heard in the Louvre.

"What is that noise about?" inquired the King.

"Well, well!" sighed Chicot. "I am fated never to have a chance of sleeping, Henri."

"Oh, nonsense."

"You 'll find it no nonsense. My son, you must hire me a room in the city, or I'll have to quit your service. Upon my sacred honor, the Louvre is habitable no longer!"

At this moment the captain of the guards entered; he looked quite scared.

"What is the matter?" inquired the King.

"Sire," replied the captain, "an envoy from M. le Duc d'Anjou has just entered the Louvre."

"With a suite?"

"No, alone."

"Then there is a twofold reason for receiving him graciously, Henri, for he is a brave man."

"Very well," said the King, trying to assume an air of calmness which his paleness belied, "very well, let all my court assemble in the grand hall, and let my valets attire me in black. A brother should be in mourning who is so unfortunate that he must treat with a brother through an ambassador!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

WHICH IS ONLY THE CONTINUATION OF THE FOREGOING — CURTAILED BY THE AUTHOR ON ACCOUNT OF IT BEING NEAR THE END OF THE YEAR.

The throne of Henri III. was in the grand hall.

Around this throne was grouped an agitated and tumultuous crowd.

The King was seated on it; he looked gloomy and there were wrinkles on his forehead.

All eyes were riveted on the gallery through which the captain of the guards would introduce the envoy.

"Sire," said Quélus, whispering in the King's ear, "do you know the name of this ambassador?"

"No; what is his name to me?"

"Sire, it is M. de Bussy; does not that fact treble the insult?"

"I cannot see where the insult lies," said Henri, trying to preserve his coolness.

"Your Majesty may not see it," said Schomberg, "but we see it plain enough."

Henri made no answer. He felt that anger and hatred were at work around his throne, and rejoiced that he had been able to place two ramparts of such strength between himself and his enemies.

Quélus, pale and red by turns, rested both his hands on the hilt of his rapier.

Schomberg took off his gloves and half drew his poniard from its sheath.

Maugiron buckled on his sword, which his page had handed to him.

D'Épernon twisted the ends of his mustache up to his eyes, but placed himself behind his companions.

As for Henri, like a hunter who hears his dogs yelping at a boar he let his favorites do as they pleased, and smiled.

"Show him in," said he.

At these words a deathlike silence pervaded the hall, though beneath that silence it seemed as if the hollow rumbling of the King's wrath might be heard.

Then a quick, firm step, accompanied by the jingling of

spurs, proudly rang on the flagstones, and sounded next in the gallery.

Bussy entered, hat in hand, his head erect, and his eyes calm.

None of those who surrounded the throne were able to attract the young man's haughty glance.

He advanced straight to Henri, made a profound inclination, and waited until he should be questioned, standing proudly before the throne, but with a pride wholly personal, the pride of the man of gentle birth, in which there can be nothing insulting to the majesty of a King.

"You here, M. de Bussy!" said Henri. "I believed you were away in Anjou."

"Sire," answered Bussy, "I was; but, as you see, I have left it."

"And what brings you to our capital?"

"The desire of presenting my humble respects to your Majesty."

The King and minions looked at one another; it was evident they had expected a different answer from a young man so impetuous.

"And for nothing else?" asked the King, in a rather stately manner.

"I will add, sire, that I have been ordered by his highness the Duc d'Anjou, my master, to unite his respects to mine."

"And the duke said nothing else?"

"He said that, being about to accompany the queen mother to Paris, he desired that your Majesty should be apprised of the return of one of your most faithful subjects."

The King was so astounded that he was unable, for a time, to continue his questions.

Chicot took advantage of the interruption to approach the ambassador.

"Good day, M. de Bussy," said he.

Bussy turned round, surprised to find a single friend in this assembly.

"Ah! M. Chicot, I am heartily glad to meet you," replied Bussy; "how is M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Oh, very well; I saw him out walking with his wife some time ago."

"So that is all you have to tell me, M. de Bussy?" inquired the King.

"Yes, sire; if there is any other important intelligence, the

Duc d'Anjou will have the honor of imparting it to you himself."

"Very well," said the King.

And, rising silently, he descended the two steps of his throne.

The audience was over, the different groups broke up.

Bussy noticed from the corner of his eye that the four minions had advanced and stationed themselves around him, forming as it were a living circle of fury and menace.

At the end of the hall, the King and his chancellor were talking in whispers.

Bussy feigned to remark nothing out of the way and continued his conversation with Chicot.

Then, as if he had entered into the plot and had come to the resolution of isolating Bussy, the King called out:

"Come here, Chicot, I have something to say to you."

Chicot saluted Bussy with a polished courtesy which showed that his claims to gentle birth were well founded.

Bussy returned the salutation with equal graciousness, and was then alone in the circle around him.

Thereupon, he changed his manner and the expression of his countenance; he had been calm before the King, polite with Chicot; now he became condescending.

Seeing Quélus approaching:

"Ah! good day, M. de Quélus," said he; "may I have the honor of asking how are you and your friends?"

"Rather poorly, monsieur," replied Quélus.

"Dear me!" cried Bussy, apparently much affected by this answer; "and pray, what has happened?"

"Something that troubles us greatly," replied Quélus.

"Something?" exclaimed Bussy, amazed. "Surely you and your friends are strong enough, you, especially, M. de Quélus, to rid yourselves of this 'something'?"

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Maugiron, thrusting Schomberg aside, who was also advancing to take part in a conversation that promised to be interesting, "it is not some *thing*, but some *person*, that M. de Quélus was alluding to."

"But if some one troubles M. de Quélus, why does he not thrust him aside in the manner you thrust some one aside just now?"

"The very advice that I gave him, M. de Bussy, and I believe Quélus has determined to follow it," said Schomberg.

"Ah, it is you, M. de Schomberg," said Bussy, "I had not the honor of recognizing you."

"Perhaps because my face is still a little blue," said Schomberg.

"No, you are very pale, on the contrary; I hope you are not indisposed, monsieur?"

"Monsieur," said Schomberg, "if I am pale it is with anger."

"Ah! really! why, then, you must, like M. de Quélus, be also troubled by some thing or by some one?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He is like myself; for there is also some one that troubles me," said Maugiron.

"Always witty, my dear M. de Maugiron," said Bussy; "but, in good sooth, gentlemen, the more I look at you, the more do your dejected faces absorb my attention."

"You forget me, monsieur," said D'Épernon, planting himself haughtily in front of Bussy.

"Pardon me, M. d'Épernon; you were, as usual, behind the others, and I have the misfortune of knowing you so slightly that it was not for me to be the first to speak."

The position of Bussy, so careless and smiling, in the centre of those four young desperadoes whose eyes spoke with terrible eloquence, was a curious spectacle.

Not to understand their purpose, it behooved a man to be either stupid or blind.

To look as if he did not understand it, it behooved a man to be a Bussy.

He was silent for a time, with the same smile playing on his lips.

Quélus, who was the first to grow impatient, stamped on the floor and shouted:

"This must have an end!"

Bussy raised his eyes to the ceiling and looked round.

"Monsieur," said he, "have you ever remarked what an echo there is in this hall? The reverberations of marble walls are singularly distinct, and words become doubly sonorous under stuccoed ceilings; while, in the open country, sounds are disseminated, and, I give you my word of honor, it is my impression that the clouds catch up a part of them. My theory is based on something in Aristophanes. Have you read Aristophanes, gentlemen?"

Maugiron fancied that the words of Bussy contained a challenge and he went up to him and attempted to whisper something in his ear.

Bussy stopped him.

"No whisperings, I beg, monsieur," said Bussy; "his Majesty is very sensitive and might take it into his head we were talk ing scandal about him."

Maugiron withdrew, more furious than ever.

Schomberg took his place, and, said in a dogged tone:

"I am a very dull, obtuse German, but I am also very frank. I speak loud, to give those who listen every chance to hear me; but when my words, which I try to render as distinct as possible, are not understood, because he to whom they are addressed is deaf or does not choose to understand them, then I" —

"You?" said Bussy, fastening on the young man, whose hand trembled with excitement, one of those looks that flash from the fathomless eyes of tigers; looks that seem to leap from an abyss and to emit torrents of flames. "You?"

Schomberg stopped.

Bussy shrugged his shoulders, whirled round on his heel, and turned his back on him.

He found himself facing D'Épernon.

D'Épernon had gone too far to be able to draw back.

"Why, gentlemen," said he, "do you notice how provincial M. de Bussy has become since he bolted with M. d'Anjou? He has a beard and no sword-knot, black boots and a gray hat!"

"The very thing I was thinking myself, my dear M. d'Épernon. When I saw you in such splendid attire, I wondered at the depths into which a few days' absence will force a man to descend. Now, here am I, — I, Louis de Bussy, Seigneur de Clermont, — compelled to take lessons in taste from a little Gascon squire. But let me pass, I entreat. You are so close to me that you have trodden on my toes — and M. de Quélus has done so also; I felt the pressure in spite of my boots," he added, with his charming smile.

Thereupon, Bussy, passing between D'Épernon and Quélus, held out his hand to Saint-Luc, who had just entered.

The hand Saint-Luc grasped was dripping with perspiration.

He saw that something out of the way was happening, and drew Bussy out of the group and then out of the hall.

A strange murmur rose among the minions and spread to the other groups of courtiers.

"It 's incredible," said Quélus, "I insulted him, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said Maugiron, "challenged him, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said Schomberg, "shook my fist in his face, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said D'Épernon, "trod on his toes, yes, actually trod on his toes, and he did not answer!"

And he looked as if the size of the foot he trod on added to his own stature.

"Clearly, he did not want to understand," said Quélus. "There is something underneath this."

"I know what it is, yes I do!" said Schomberg, — "know for sure!"

"And what is it, then?"

"He knew that we four could kill him, and he does n't like being killed."

At that moment the King approached his young gentlemen, Chicot whispering in his ear.

"Well?" he asked; "what was M. de Bussy saying? I thought I heard some rather loud talk in this quarter."

"You would like to know what M. de Bussy was saying, sire?" inquired D'Épernon.

"Yes, you are aware I am just a little inquisitive," replied Henri, with a smile.

"Upon my faith, sire, he said nothing to brag about," answered Quélus. "Sire, he is no longer a Parisian!"

"And what is he, then?"

"A clown. He steps aside to let his betters pass."

"Oh! nonsense!" returned the King; "what does that mean?"

"It means I am going to train a dog to bite his calves," answered Quélus; "and yet — who knows? — likely enough he won't feel it through his boots."

"And I have a quintain at home," said Schomberg, "I think I 'll call it Bussy."

"And I 'll go a little farther," said D'Épernon. "To-day I trod on his toes, to-morrow I 'll slap his face. He is a sham hero, a hero in his own conceit; he says to himself, 'I have

fought for the sake of honor; now I'll be prudent for the sake of life.'"

"What!" cried Henri, in pretended anger, "you have dared to ill use one of my brother's gentlemen in the very Louvre, in my own house?"

"Alas! yes," answered Maugiron, replying with affected humility to the King's affected indignation, "and although we have ill used him very seriously, I give you my solemn word he never answered."

The King turned to Chicot, with a smile, and whispered in his ear:

"Still bellowing, are they, Chicot, eh? Hem! I think they have roared to some purpose, eh?"

"Or, perhaps, they have mewed," said Chicot. "I am acquainted with people who will shiver like an aspen when they hear your pussy's caterwaulings. Perhaps M. de Bussy is one of them. And now you know why he left without answering."

"You think so?" said the King.

"Those who live will see," answered Chicot, sententiously.

"Talk away," said Henri; "it's a case of 'like master, like man.'"

"Do you mean by these words, sire, that Bussy is your brother's serving-man? You were never more mistaken in your life."

"Gentlemen," said Henri, "I am going to dine in the Queen's apartments. Good-by. The Gelosi[1] will play a farce for our amusement. I invite you to see it."

The courtiers inclined respectfully, and the King passed out through the great door.

At that very moment Saint-Luc entered through the little door.

He stopped with a gesture the four gentlemen, who were also going out.

"I beg your pardon, M. de Quélus," said he, with a bow, "are you still living in the Rue Sainte-Honoré?"

"Yes, my dear friend, why do you ask?" inquired Quélus.

"I have a few words to say to you."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Might I venture to ask what is your address also, M. de Schomberg?"

[1] Italian actors who gave their performances in the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

"I live in the Rue de Béthisy," said Schomberg, astonished.

"D'Épernon, I know yours, I think."

"Rue de Grenelle."

"You are my neighbor — And you, Maugiron?"

"I live in the Louvre quarter."

"I shall begin with you, if you will permit me — or — excuse me — with Quélus."

"I have it! at least, I think I understand. You come on the part of M. de Bussy?"

"I need not say on whose part I have come; I have to speak with you, that is all."

"With the whole four of us?"

"Yes."

"Very well. But as you may not wish to speak with us in the Louvre, and I presume you do not care to do so, as it is hardly the proper place to discuss such matters, we had better assemble in one of our houses. There we can all learn what you have to say to each of us individually."

"I am satisfied."

"Then, let us go to Schomberg's; it is within a few yards of us."

"Yes, let us go to my house in the Rue de Béthisy," said the young man.

"Very well," answered Saint-Luc, with another bow. "Please show us the way, M. de Schomberg."

"With great pleasure."

The five gentlemen passed out of the Louvre, arm in arm, and formed a line which occupied the entire width of the street.

Behind them marched their lackeys armed to the teeth.

When they reached the Rue de Béthisy and entered the Hôtel de Schomberg, the German went upstairs to see that the grand drawing-room was prepared for their reception. Saint-Luc stopped in the antechamber.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOW M. DE SAINT-LUC FULFILLED THE COMMISSION GIVEN HIM BY BUSSY.

Let us leave Saint-Luc for a moment in Schomberg's antechamber, and turn our attention to what had passed between him and Bussy.

Bussy had, as we have already mentioned, left the audience chamber with his friend, after bowing courteously to all those who were not inclined to curry favor with the King at the expense of arousing the anger of so redoubtable a personage as the valiant count.

In that age of brutal force, when personal efficiency was everything, a man, if he were vigorous and adroit, could carve a little moral and physical realm for himself out of this fair realm of France.

And so, after a fashion, Bussy was a king in the court of King Henry III.

But on the day in question, Bussy had not been very well received in his kingdom.

Once outside the hall, Saint-Luc had halted and looked anxiously at his face.

"Are you really ill, my friend?" he asked. "In fact, you are so pale that you look as if you were ready to faint."

"No," said Bussy, "but I am fairly stifling with anger."

"Oh, nonsense. Surely you don't mind the gabble of those coxcombs?"

"*Corbleu!* my dear friend, you'll soon see whether I mind it or not."

"Come, come, now, Bussy, be calm."

"You are a nice fellow to talk of calmness. If they had said to you the half of what they said to me, I think, from what I know of you, there would be at least one dead man lying round somewhere by this time."

"Well, what do you desire?"

"You are my friend, Saint-Luc, and have given me a terrible proof of your friendship."

"Ah! my dear friend," said Saint-Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, "the affair is n't worth talking about;

why speak of it, then? Don't, or you 'll vex me. Certainly, it was a pretty little lunge, and succeeded to a marvel. But I don't deserve any credit; it was the King showed it to me during the time he kept me locked up in the Louvre."

"My dear friend" —

"Let us leave Monsoreau where he is and talk of Diane. Did she take it in good part, the poor little dear? Has she pardoned me? When will the wedding be? and when will the christening be?"

"Ah! my good friend, we must wait for all that until Monsoreau is dead."

"What do you mean?" cried Saint-Luc, starting back as if he had trodden on a pointed nail.

"Alas! my dear friend, beds of poppies are not so dangerous as you once believed, and a person does not always die when he falls on top of one of them. On the contrary, the person in question lives, and is madder than ever."

"Bah! you 're not serious?"

"Serious! Heavens! don't I wish I were n't! He talks of nothing but vengeance, and swears to kill you on the first opportunity. That 's how the matter stands at present."

"He lives?"

"Alas! yes."

"And what confounded ass of a doctor attended him?"

"My own doctor, dear friend."

"Heavens and earth! I 'll never get over it!" cried Saint-Luc, utterly crushed by this revelation. "Zounds, man, I 'm dishonored forever! And I told everybody about it! and all his heirs are no doubt now wearing mourning! The rascal! to give me the lie in this fashion! But I won't stand it. I 'll catch on to him somewhere, and at our next meeting it is n't one hole I 'll make in him — four, if necessary."

"Pray, be calm, my dear Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "it 's your turn now to receive a little advice. Really, I am better off than you imagine. Only think of it! Monsoreau fancies it was the duke that sent you to make away with him; and so it is of the duke he is jealous. On the other hand, I am an angel, a precious friend, a Bayard. I am his 'dear Bussy,' in a word. Quite natural, you see, for it was that dunderhead of a Rémy that cured him."

"How did such an idiotic idea get into his head?"

"Oh, the thing is simple enough; such ideas do get into the

heads of honest men. He fancies it is a doctor's duty to cure people."

"Why, the fellow must be a visionary, then!"

"But, as I was about to say, Monsoreau believes he owes his life to me, and has asked me to take care of his wife."

"Ah! I can see now why you await his death with such composure. But your news has struck me all of a heap, I can tell you!"

"My dear friend!"

"Yes, upon my honor. What you tell me takes away my breath."

"You see that at present we need not trouble ourselves about Monsoreau."

"Right. Let us enjoy life as long as he is on the sick list. But the moment I hear he is out of bed, I shall order myself a suit of mail and put iron shutters on all my windows. And you will find out from the Duc d'Anjou whether his excellent mother has not given him some receipt or other for an antidote against poisons. You will? In the meantime, my dear fellow, why not have all the diversion we can?"

Bussy could not help smiling; he linked his arm in Saint-Luc's.

"So, my dear Saint-Luc," said he, "you see you have only done me half a service!"

Saint-Luc stared at him in amazement.

'Yes, after all, you're right. Do you want me to put the finishing touch on my work? I should n't altogether like it; but for you, my dear Bussy, there are a good many things I would do, particularly if he should look at me out of that jaundiced eye of his, — faugh!"

"No, no. As I said, we need not trouble ourselves about Monsoreau at present. If you think you owe me a debt, you can pay it in another way" —

"Well, go on, I am listening."

"How do you stand with the minions?"

"Faith, we are something like cats and dogs in the sunlight. As long as it gives heat to the whole of us, we have nothing to quarrel about; but if one take any portion of the warmth and light from the other — oh! then I would not answer for the consequences."

"Is it so? My friend, what you say delights me."

"Ah! so much the better."

"Suppose a sunbeam be intercepted?"

"Suppose it is. Granted."

"In that case you will show me your beautiful white teeth, stretch out your formidable claws, and then the fun will begin."

"I don't quite understand."

Bussy smiled.

"Well, my dear friend, will you go for me to M. de Quélus?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

"You are beginning to understand, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Capital. You will ask him what day it will please him that I should cut his throat or he mine."

"I will do so."

"You do not mind it?"

"Not the least in the world. I will go whenever you wish — immediately, if you like."

"A moment. After calling on M. de Quélus, you will next make the same proposal to M. de Schomberg, will you not?"

"Ah!" cried Saint-Luc, "M. de Schomberg also! What a devil of a man you are, Bussy!"

Bussy made a gesture that did not admit of reply.

"Agreed," said Saint-Luc; "thy will be done."

"Then, my dear Saint-Luc, as you are so amiable," continued Bussy, "I will ask you to visit M. de Maugiron — he is on guard at the Louvre, for I saw he had on his gorget — and request him to join the party, will you not?"

"Oh, three! you cannot mean it, Bussy! Well, I hope that 's all, at least?"

"By no means."

"What! not all?"

"From there you will go to M. d'Épernon. I do not ask you to trouble your head much about him, for, in my eyes, he is a very poor creature; but, then, he will make up the number!"

Saint-Luc dropped his arms in dismay and stared at Bussy.

"Four!" he murmured.

"You are quite correct, my dear friend," said Bussy, nodding assent; "four. I need not recommend a person of your intelligence, valor, and courtesy to display, in regard to these gentlemen, all that amiability and politeness which you possess in so high a degree" —

"Oh! my dear friend" —

"I am fully persuaded that the whole affair will be managed by you in a chivalrous fashion, in the manner befitting persons of our high rank. Am I not right?"

"You shall be content, my friend."

Bussy offered his hand, with a smile, to Saint-Luc.

"I am sure of it," said he. "Ah! my worthy minions, you'll find out, perhaps, that they laugh best who laugh last!"

"And now, my dear friend, the conditions."

"What conditions?"

"Yours."

"I make none. I accept the conditions of the minions."

"Your weapons?"

"The weapons of the minions."

"The day, the place, the hour?"

"The day, the place, the hour of the minions."

"But" —

"Oh, let us dismiss such trifles. Act, and act quickly, my dear friend. I shall be in the little garden of the Louvre, where you will find me as soon as your mission is accomplished."

"Then you intend waiting for me there?"

"Yes."

"Well, do so. But, egad, you may have to stay there a considerable time."

"I have plenty of time."

We know now how it came to pass that Saint-Luc went in search of the four minions, found them all still in the Louvre, and engaged them in conversation.

It is now time to return to Bussy's friend, whom we left in the antechamber of the Hôtel de Schomberg, waiting, according to the laws of etiquette then in vogue, until the royal favorites, who were pretty certain of the purpose of his visit, should be formally installed, each in one of the four corners of the vast drawing-room.

When this ceremony was accomplished, the folding-doors were flung wide open, and an usher came and saluted Saint-Luc, who, with his right hand, in which he held his hat, resting on his hip, and his left pressing the hilt of his rapier, which gracefully tilted up his cloak, marched to the centre of the threshold and then halted.

"M. d'Espinay de Saint-Luc!" cried the usher.

Whereupon Saint-Luc entered.

Schomberg, as master of the house, rose and proceeded to meet his guest, who, instead of saluting, put on his hat.

This formality marked the character of the visit.

Schomberg replied by bowing a second time; then, turning to Quélus:

"I have the honor to present to you," said he, "M. Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus."

Saint-Luc took a step toward Quélus, and, with a profound inclination, said:

"I was looking for you, monsieur."

Quélus saluted.

Schomberg turned to another corner of the hall, saying:

"I have the honor to present to you M. Louis de Maugiron."

Same salutations by Saint-Luc and Maugiron.

"I was looking for you, monsieur," said Saint-Luc.

A similar ceremony was gone through in the same cold and impassive manner with D'Épernon.

Then it was the turn of Schomberg, who presented himself and received the same reply.

When these preliminaries were finished, the four friends sat down, while Saint-Luc continued to stand.

"M. le Comte," said he to Quélus, "you have insulted M. le Comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, who presents you his very humble compliments, and begs you to meet him in single combat, on such a day and at such an hour as may suit your convenience, in order that you may fight with such weapons as you may choose, until death ensue — Do you accept?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Quélus, "and M. le Comte de Bussy does me great honor."

"Your day, M. le Comte?"

"I have no preference — only, I should prefer to-morrow to the day after to-morrow, and the day after that to any later date."

"Your hour?"

"In the morning."

"Your weapons?"

"Rapier and poniard, if M. de Bussy do not object."

Saint-Luc bowed.

"Whatever you decide on that point," said he, "is law to M. de Bussy."

Afterward, the same formality was gone through with the three others.

"But," said Schomberg, who, as master of the house, had been the last to be addressed and to answer, "there is one thing we have not thought of, M. de Saint-Luc. It is that if we were all pleased to choose the same day and the same hour — and chance sometimes brings about strange eventualities — M. de Bussy would be rather embarrassed."

M. de Saint-Luc saluted, smiling in his courtliest manner.

"Certainly," said he; "M. de Bussy might be embarrassed, as must any other gentleman in a combat with four valiant men like you. But he says the incident would have no novelty for him, as it has already happened at Les Tournelles, near the Bastile."

"And he would fight us all four?" said D'Épernon.

"All four," answered Saint-Luc.

"Separately?" inquired Schomberg.

"Separately or together; the challenge is for all, individually or collectively."

The four young men looked at one another. Quélus was the first to break silence.

"M. de Bussy's offer is very fine," said he, crimson with rage, "but, however insignificant he may deem us, we can each perform our task singly. We will accept the count's proposal, then, and fight him separately, or, what would be better still" —

Quélus looked round at his companions, who, doubtless understanding his meaning, nodded their heads in assent.

"Or, what would be still better," he repeated, "as we do not want to assassinate a gallant man, let chance decide which of us is to fight M. de Bussy."

"But," said D'Épernon, quickly, "what about the three others?"

"The three others! Surely, M. de Bussy has too many friends and we too many enemies for the three others to be obliged to stand with their arms folded.

"Is that your opinion, gentlemen?" he asked, looking at each in turn.

"Yes," said they all, in unison.

"It would give me the greatest pleasure, in fact," said Schomberg, "if M. de Bussy invited M. de Livarot to our festival."

"If I might venture to express a wish on the subject," said Maugiron, "I should desire M. de Balzac d'Entragues to be of the party."

"And the party would be complete," said Quélus, "if M. de Ribeirac graciously consented to accompany his friends."

"Gentlemen," said Saint-Luc, "I will transmit your wishes to M. le Comte de Bussy, and I think I may assure you in advance that he is too courteous not to comply with them. It only remains for me, then, to thank you most sincerely in the name of M. de Bussy."

Saint-Luc bowed anew, and the four gentlemen who had just been challenged lowered their heads to the same level as his.

The minions then escorted Saint-Luc to the door of the apartment.

He found the four lackeys in the last antechamber.

He took his purse and flung it among them, saying:

"To enable you to drink to your masters' health."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

SHOWING HOW SAINT–LUC WAS MORE CIVILIZED THAN BUSSY, THE LESSONS HE GAVE HIM, AND THE USE MADE OF THEM BY THE FAIR DIANE'S LOVER.

SAINT–LUC returned, proud of having executed his commission so well.

Bussy was waiting for him and thanked him.

Saint-Luc perceived that he was very sad, and this was not natural in the case of so brave a man at the news of a glorious duel.

"Have I managed badly?" said Saint-Luc; "you seem quite put out."

"By my faith, my dear friend, I regret that, instead of appointing another day, you did not say: 'at once.'"

"Ah! patience, the Angevines have n't come yet. Why the devil won't you give them time to come? And then, I don't see why you should be in such a hurry to pile up a heap of dead and dying people."

"It is because I wish to die as soon as possible."

Saint-Luc stared at Bussy in utter amazement.

"Die at your age! and with such a mistress and such a name?"

"Yes, I know I shall kill the whole four of them; but I am also sure of receiving a cut or thrust myself that will ensure me peace for all eternity."

"What black ideas are these?"

"I'd just like to see you in my case! A husband I thought dead, and now he's alive and kicking; a woman never able to leave the bedside of this sham corpse. Never to see her, never to smile on her, never to touch her hand. *Mordieu!* how I wish I could make mincemeat of some one — I don't care whom!"

The answer to this sally was a roar of laughter from Saint-Luc that scattered a whole flock of sparrows who were pecking at the fruit of a tree in the little garden of the Louvre.

"Ah!" cried he, "did one ever see such an artless creature! And to think that all the women are in love with this Bussy! Why, he's a schoolboy! But, my dear friend, you really are losing your senses: there is not in the whole world as lucky a lover as you."

"Oh! indeed! Well, prove me that, thou married man."

"*Nihil facilius*, as used to say my old pedagogue, the Jesuit Triquet. Are you not Monsoreau's friend?"

"Yes, faith; though on account of my respect for the human understanding, I'm ashamed to confess it. Yes, that clown calls me friend."

"Well! be his friend."

"Oh! and abuse such a title!"

"*Prorsus absurdum*, would answer Triquet again. Is he really your friend?"

"Well, he says he is."

"He can't be, since he renders you unhappy. Now, the end of friendship is to make men happy in their relations to one another. At least, so his Majesty defines friendship, and the King is a scholar."

Bussy burst out laughing.

"Allow me to continue," Saint-Luc went on. "If he renders you unhappy he is not your friend. Therefore, you may treat him as a stranger, and take his wife from him; or as an enemy, and kill him, if he make any objection."

"In fact," said Bussy, "I detest him."

"And he is afraid of you."

"Do you think he does not like me?"

"Egad, find out. Take his wife from him and you'll see."

"Is that, too, the logic of Father Triquet?"

"No, it's mine."

"Allow me to compliment you on it."

"You like it?"

"No, I prefer to be a man of honor."

"And let Madame de Monsoreau cure her husband both physically and morally, for it is certain that if you get yourself killed she will become attached to the only man left her."

Bussy frowned.

"But, at any rate," added Saint-Luc, "here comes Madame de Saint-Luc, and her advice is worth having. After gathering a nosegay in the queen mother's garden, she will be in the best of humor. Listen to her; her words are golden."

He had hardly finished when Jeanne appeared, radiant with happiness and as arch and roguish as ever.

Hers was one of those winsome natures that, like the lark soaring over the plains, awakens joy and hope in the hearts of all within its reach.

Bussy saluted her cordially.

She offered him her hand, which is a convincing proof that this mode of greeting existed before our ambassador, Abbé Dubois, was said to have brought it with him from England with the treaty of the Triple Alliance.

"And how is your love affair progressing?" she asked, as she tied her flowers with a golden thread.

"Sinking into the grave," said Bussy.

"Oh, nonsense," answered Saint-Luc, "it is only wounded or in a fainting-fit. I am ready to wager that Jeanne will restore the patient to life, won't you, Jeanne?"

"But," said she, "I must first see the wound."

"In two words," said Saint-Luc, "this is the gist of the matter: Bussy objects to being on friendly terms with Monsoreau and has decided to withdraw."

"And forsake Diane?" cried Jeanne, in terror.

Bussy was moved by her emotion and added:

"Ah! madame, Saint-Luc has not told you that I wish for death."

Jeanne gazed at him for a moment with a compassion that was not altogether saint-like.

"Poor Diane!" she murmured. "Oh! the value of love! What ingrates men are!"

"Capital!" exclaimed Saint-Luc. "Now you have a touch of the morality of my wife."

"I an ingrate!" cried Bussy, "and all because I refuse to degrade my love by practising a disgraceful hypocrisy!"

"Oh, monsieur, that is but a discreditable pretence," said Jeanne. "If you were really in love, the only degradation you would fear would be that of being no longer loved."

"Aha!" said Saint-Luc, "you 're catching it, my friend."

"But, madame," cried Bussy, passionately, "there are sacrifices that" —

"Not another word. Confess you love Diane no longer. It will be more worthy of a man with any chivalry in him."

Bussy turned pale at the mere thought.

"You do not dare to say so to her? Then I will."

"Madame! madame!"

"Oh, you are splendid fellows, you men, you and your sacrifices — And do we make no sacrifices? What! she exposes herself to the danger of being murdered by that tiger Monsoreau; she preserves all her rights by the display of a strength of will to which a Samson and a Hannibal were strangers; she tames a ferocious beast, and all that she may harness herself to the chariot wheels of the triumphant gentleman before me, — and that is not heroism? Oh! I call Heaven to witness that Diane is sublime, and I should not have been able to do a quarter of what she does every day."

"Thank you," answered Saint-Luc, with a most reverential bow, at which Jeanne burst out laughing.

Bussy hesitated.

"And he reflects!" cries Jeanne; "he does not fall on his knees and say his *mea culpa!*"

"You are right," said Bussy. "I am only a man, that is to say, an imperfect creature, and inferior to the most commonplace woman."

"It is very fortunate," said Jeanne; "that you are convinced at last."

"What do you order me to do?"

"Go and visit" —

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Who is talking of Monsoreau? — Diane."

"But they are always together, as far as I can see."

"When you used to visit Madame de Barbezieux did she not always have that big monkey of hers beside her, and did it not bite you because it was jealous?"

Bussy had to laugh, Saint-Luc imitated him, and Jeanne followed suit. Their laughter was so noisy that it brought all the courtiers walking in the galleries of the Louvre to the windows.

"Madame," said Bussy, at length, "I am going to the Hôtel de Monsoreau. Adieu."

Thereupon they separated, after Bussy had warned Saint-Luc to say nothing of the impending duel with the minions.

He found Monsoreau in bed.

The count uttered an exclamation of pleasure as soon as he saw him.

Rémy had just promised him that his wound would heal in three weeks.

Diane laid a finger on her lips: it was her manner of saluting her lover.

Bussy had to relate to Monsoreau the entire history of the commission entrusted to him by the Duc d'Anjou, his visit to the court, the King's ungracious reception, and the coldness shown him by the minions.

"Coldness" was the word used by Bussy. Diane was forced to laugh.

These tidings rendered Monsoreau very thoughtful. He requested Bussy to bring his face close to his, and whispered in his ear.

"There is some scheme or other under all this, is there not?"

"I believe so," answered Bussy.

"Take my advice," said the grand huntsman. "Do not get into trouble for the sake of that base villain. I know him; he is treacherous; capable of the blackest perfidy, I assure you."

"I know it," answered Bussy, with a smile which reminded the count of the occasion upon which his new friend had been a sufferer from the duke's double dealing.

"You see," resumed Monsoreau, "you are my friend and I wish to put you on your guard. I hope you will ask my advice every time you are in a difficult position."

"Monsieur! monsieur!" cried Rémy. "You must really go to sleep now, as you have had your wound dressed. Come, come, go to sleep."

"Yes, my dear doctor. My friend, be kind enough to take a turn in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau. I am told it is charming at this time of the year."

"I am at your orders," replied Bussy.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE PRECAUTIONS OF M. DE MONSOREAU.

Saint-Luc was right, Jeanne was right; Bussy saw this at the end of the week and did them full justice.

Bussy had often thought what a grand and glorious thing it would be to have been a hero of antiquity. But, if he had been a hero of antiquity, he should now be a very old man, and Bussy, forgetful of Plutarch, who had ceased to be his favorite author ever since love had corrupted him; Bussy, as handsome as Alcibiades; Bussy, caring for nothing except the present, had little liking for historical articles dealing with the continence of Scipio or Bayard.

Diane was more simple, more of a child of nature, as we say to-day. She was entirely swayed by two instincts which the misanthropical Figaro tells us are innate in the female species: love and deception. She had never had the least idea of making her opinions on what Charron and Montaigne call *honesté* a subject of philosophical speculation.

To love Bussy was her logic; to belong to Bussy, her ethics; to thrill in every fibre of her body at the slightest touch of his hand, her metaphysics.

Since the fortnight when the accident had occurred, M. de Monsoreau had been growing better and better. He had escaped fever, thanks to the application of cold water, — a new remedy revealed by chance, or rather by Providence, to Ambroise Paré, — when he suddenly experienced a fresh shock: he learned that the Duc d'Anjou had just arrived at Paris with the queen mother and his Angevines.

There was some reason for the count's uneasiness: the day after his arrival, the prince, under the pretext of inquiring after the grand huntsman's health, entered his hôtel in the Rue des Petits-Pères. You cannot very well close your doors in the face of a princely personage who gives you such proof

of a tender interest in your condition. M. de Monsoreau received the prince, who was most amiable to M. de Monsoreau, but particularly amiable to M. de Monsoreau's wife.

As soon as the duke was gone, Monsoreau called for Diane, and, in spite of the remonstrances of Rémy, walked thrice around his armchair, leaning on her arm.

After this, he sat down again in the same armchair, around which, as we have said, he had just traced a triple line of circumvallation. He looked as if he was well pleased, and Diane guessed from his smile that he was plotting some underhand manœuvre.

But this matter has to do with the private history of the house of Monsoreau.

Let us return, then, to the arrival of the Duc d'Anjou, which belongs to the epic portion of our narrative.

The day when Monseigneur François de Valois made his entry into the Louvre was, as may be easily imagined, a very interesting day to those who witnessed it.

And this is what they saw:

Great arrogance in the behavior of the King.

Great indifference in the behavior of the queen mother.

A sort of humble insolence in the behavior of the Duc d'Anjou, who seemed to be saying:

"Why the devil did you recall me, if you look so sourly on me now that I am here?"

This ungracious reception was rendered still more interesting by the furious, flaming, devouring looks of Messieurs Livarot, Ribeirac, and Entragues, who, having been forewarned by Bussy, were delighted to show their future adversaries, that, if no obstacle to the duel came from the minions, assuredly none should come on their side.

On that day, Chicot moved about more actively than Cæsar on the eve of the battle of Pharsalia.

And then matters settled down quietly enough.

Two days after his return to the Louvre, François paid a second visit to the Comte de Monsoreau.

The grand huntsman had been informed of the nature of the duke's interview with his brother in its slightest details, and did his best, by voice and gesture, to inflame the former's animosity toward the King.

The grand huntsman was improving every day, and, when the prince departed, he took the arm of his wife again, and,

instead of walking thrice round his chair, he walked once round the apartment.

Then he sat down, and looked even better pleased than on the first occasion.

That same evening Diane warned Bussy that it was quite certain M. de Monsoreau had some scheme or other in his head.

A moment after, Monsoreau and Bussy were alone.

"When I think," said Monsoreau to Bussy, "that this prince, who looks so sweet upon me, is my deadly enemy, and is the prime mover in Saint-Luc's attempt to assassinate me" —

"Assassinate you!" exclaimed Bussy. "Oh! monsieur, that is going too far. Saint-Luc is an honorable gentleman, and you have acknowledged yourself that you challenged him, were the first to draw, and received your wound while fighting."

"I agree to all that, but it is not the less true he acted at the instigation of the Duc d'Anjou."

"Listen," said Bussy, "I know the duke, but I know Saint-Luc better. I must tell you Saint-Luc is entirely devoted to the King and anything but devoted to the prince. If your wound, indeed, had come from Antraguet, Livarot, or Ribeirac, I could understand — but from Saint-Luc" —

"You do not know the history of France as I know it, my dear M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, stubborn in his opinion.

Bussy might have answered that, though he did not know the history of France, he was perfectly well acquainted with the history of Anjou, especially with that of a corner of it called Méridor.

At length the time came when Monsoreau was able to rise and walk in the garden.

"I am well enough now," said he, as he was returning with Rèmy; "this evening we shall change our quarters."

"Why so?" asked the doctor. "Do you consider the air of the Rue des Petits-Pères bad for you, or do you want more society?"

"On the contrary, I have too much society," said Monsoreau. "M. d'Anjou wearies me with his visits; he is always accompanied by thirty of his gentlemen, and the jingling of their spurs irritates my nerves."

"But where are you going?"

"I have ordered my little house at Les Tournelles to be got ready."

Bussy and Diane, for Bussy was always present, exchanged a look of loving remembrance.

"What! that hovel!" cried Rémy, thoughtlessly.

"Ah! you know it, then?" said Monsoreau.

"*Pardieu!* who does n't know the abodes of the grand huntsman of France, and, especially, one who has lived in the Rue Beautrellis?"

Monsoreau was naturally mistrustful, and some vague suspicion arose in his mind.

"Yes, yes, I will go there," said he; "I shall feel quite at my ease in the little house. Four persons are as many as it can hold conveniently. It is a fortress, and I can see from the windows any one who comes to visit me three hundred yards off."

"So that" — inquired Rémy.

"So that I can refuse to receive him if I wish, particularly when I am completely recovered."

Bussy bit his lips; he feared there might come a time when he would refuse to receive him.

Diane sighed. She remembered the time when she had seen Bussy lying wounded and in a deathlike swoon upon her bed.

Rèmy was reflecting; consequently, he was the first of the three to speak.

"You cannot," said he.

"And why, if you please, M. le Docteur?"

"Because a grand huntsman of France must hold receptions, must keep up a great train of attendants, must have any number of equipages. No one will wonder if he have a palace for his dogs — but a kennel for himself! impossible!"

"Hum!" muttered Monsoreau, in a tone that said plainly: "That is true."

"And then," continued Rémy, "for I am a doctor of the mind as well as of the body, — it is not your staying here that troubles you."

"What is it, pray?"

"It is madame's staying here."

"Well?"

"Well, send the countess away."

"Part from my wife!" cried Monsoreau, in a voice in which there was certainly more anger than love.

"Then part from your office, resign your post as grand

huntsman. I think it would be wise; you will either fulfil your duties or you will not; if you do not, you displease the King; if you" —

"I will do what I have to do, but I will not leave the countess," said Monsoreau, from between his closed teeth.

No sooner were the words spoken than a great uproar, made by horses and the voices of their riders, was heard from the courtyard.

Monsoreau shuddered.

"The duke again!" he murmured.

"Yes," said Rémy, who had gone to the window, "it is he."

The young man had not finished, when, thanks to the privilege princes have of entering unannounced, the duke entered the apartment.

Monsoreau was on the watch; he saw that the first glance of François had been for Diane.

The obtrusive gallantries of the prince enlightened him still further.

He brought to Diane one of the inimitable masterpieces that used to be made by those illustrious artists who spent a lifetime in fashioning two or three marvels, marvels that, in spite of the slowness of production, were much more common then than now.

It was a poniard with a handle of chased gold; this handle was a sort of vinaigrette; the engravings on the blade represented, with surpassing genius, a hunt, in which dogs, horses, hunters, game, trees, sky, all were mingled in such harmonious confusion that the ravished beholder found it hard to take his eyes away from this miracle of azure and gold.

"Let me look at it," said Monsoreau, who feared there might be a note concealed in the handle.

The prince relieved him of this fear by separating it into two parts.

"The blade is for you, you are a hunter," said he; "the handle is for the countess. Good day, Bussy; I see you are quite an intimate friend of the count now."

Diane blushed.

But Bussy kept his self-control.

"Monseigneur," said he, "your highness seems to forget that you ordered me this morning to inquire after M. de Monsoreau's health. I have obeyed your orders, as I always do."

"It is true," said the duke.

Then he sat down near Diane, and spoke with her in an undertone.

After a few seconds:

"Count," said he, "it is awfully hot in this sick-chamber. I see that the countess is stifling, and I am going to offer her my arm for a turn in the garden."

The husband and the lover exchanged wrathful looks.

The prince invited Diane to descend; she rose and took his arm.

"Give me your arm," said Monsoreau to Bussy.

And Monsoreau descended behind his wife.

"Why!" exclaimed the duke, "you are quite recovered, are you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and I hope to be soon able to accompany Madame de Monsoreau everywhere she goes."

"I am glad of that. But, meanwhile, take care not to overexert yourself."

Monsoreau himself felt that the duke's warning was not to be neglected. He sat down in a spot where he could have a good view of the pair.

"By the way, count," said he to Bussy, "unless it would be trespassing on your kindness, I would ask you to escort Madame de Monsoreau to my little hôtel near the Bastile. I should feel more easy in my mind if she were there. Having torn her from the vulture's claws at Méridor, I do not want to have her devoured at Paris."

"No, no, monsieur," said Rémy to his master, "no, you cannot accept."

"And why not?" asked Monsoreau.

"Because he belongs to M. d'Anjou, and M. d'Anjou would never forgive him for helping M. de Monsoreau to play such a trick upon him."

"What do I care?" the impetuous young man was about to cry, when a glance from Rémy told him to keep silence.

Monsoreau was reflecting.

"Rémy is right," said he; "I ought not to demand such a service from you. I will conduct her there myself. In a day or two the house will be ready."

"It is madness," said Bussy, "you would lose your office."

"Possibly," answered the count; "but I shall keep my wife."

And the words were accompanied by a frown that made Bussy sigh.

However, not on the next day, but that very evening, the count went with his wife to the house at Les Tournelles with which our readers are so well acquainted.

Rémy assisted in rendering the convalescent comfortable.

Then, as he was a man of transcendent devotion, and as he saw that in such an out of the way locality Bussy would have great need of his help amid the dangers that now menaced his relations with Diane, he made advances to Gertrude, who began by beating and ended by forgiving him.

Diane took her old room in the front, overlooking the porch, the room with the bed of white and gold damask.

Nothing but a corridor separated this chamber from that of the Comte de Monsoreau.

Bussy tore his hair out in handfuls.

Saint-Luc maintained that rope-ladders had now attained the very highest degree of perfection and ought to take the place of staircases.

Monsoreau rubbed his hands and smiled, for he thought of the disappointment and rage of the Duc d'Anjou.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A VISIT TO THE HOUSE AT LES TOURNELLES.

In some men excessive excitement is a substitute for real passion, just as hunger gives to wolves and hyenas an appearance of true courage.

It was under the influence of some such sentiment that M. d'Anjou, whose rage was indescribable when he no longer found Diane at Méridor, had returned to Paris; he was now almost in love with this woman, and for the simple reason that she had escaped him.

As a consequence, his hatred for Monsoreau, a hatred dating from the day he learned the count had betrayed him, had changed into a sort of fury, a fury the more dangerous that, having already had experience of the grand huntsman's resolute character, he determined to strike surely, and yet incur no risk himself.

On the other hand, he had not renounced his political hopes — quite the contrary; and the assurance he felt of his

own importance was now greater than ever. On his return to Paris, he resumed his dark and subterranean machinations.

The moment was favorable.

A large number of persons, belonging to that class of wavering conspirators always devoted to success, were affected by the seeming triumph the weakness of the King and the astuteness of Catharine had given to the Angevines, and eagerly rallied round the duke, uniting by imperceptible but powerful threads the cause of the prince to that of the Guises, who remained prudently in the background, observing a silence which alarmed Chicot excessively.

As for Bussy, the duke no longer confided to him any of his political plans, but was more effusive in his hypocritical demonstrations of friendship than ever. The prince was vaguely troubled by Bussy's position in Monsoreau's household, and he harbored malice against the young man on account of the confidence which the grand huntsman, so distrustful of others, seemed to feel in him.

He took fright also at the joy so apparent in Diane's face, a joy which had painted her cheeks with those rosy tints that rendered her now as desirable as she had before been adorable.

The prince knew that flowers get their color and perfume only from the sun, and women only from love. Diane was visibly happy, and to the prince, always malevolent and moody, the happiness of others was a personal offence.

Born a prince, become powerful by dark and tortuous methods, determined to make use of force to gratify his love as well as his revenge, and well served by Aurilly besides, the duke deemed it a shameful thing that he should be arrested in his desires by such ridiculous obstacles as a husband's jealousy or a wife's repugnance.

One morning, after he had slept badly and passed a night filled with hideous dreams, he felt in the humor for beginning operations and ordered his suite to accompany him on a visit to Monsoreau.

Monsoreau, as we know, had already set out for Les Tournelles.

The prince smiled at this information.

It was the afterpiece following the comedy of Méridor.

He inquired, but merely for form's sake, where the house was situated; he was told it was in the Place Saint-Antoine. Turning then to Bussy, who was in attendance on him:

"Since he has gone to Les Tournelles, let us go there too," said he.

The escort resumed its march, and the entire quarter was soon in commotion on the appearance of these twenty-four fine gentlemen, who composed the ordinary suite of the prince, and who had each two lackeys and three horses.

The prince knew the house and the door well; Bussy's knowledge of them was as accurate as that of the prince.

Both stopped in front of the door, entered the alley, and went upstairs together. The prince entered the apartments; Bussy remained on the landing.

It resulted from this arrangement that the prince, who seemed to be the privileged person, saw only Monsoreau, who was lying on a sofa, while Bussy was received by Diane and tenderly clasped in her arms, Gertrude keeping watch.

Monsoreau, naturally pale, grew livid at the sight of the prince. It was for him a terrible vision.

"Monseigneur!" he exclaimed, quivering with anger. "Monseigneur in my poor house! Really, it is too much honor for such an insignificant person as myself."

The irony was evident, for the count scarcely took the trouble to disguise it.

However, the prince paid no attention to it, and, approaching Monsoreau, smilingly:

"Wherever a suffering friend of mine goes," said he, "I go also to inquire after his health."

"I believe your highness said the word 'friend,' or I am mistaken?"

"So I did, my dear count; how are you?"

"Much better, monseigneur, I can already walk about, and in a week I shall be quite well."

"Was it your doctor that prescribed the air of the Bastile for you?" inquired the prince, apparently with the utmost frankness.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Did you not find the Rue des Petits-Pères healthful?"

"No, monseigneur, I had to receive too much company there, and they made too much noise."

The count uttered these words in a tone of firmness that did not escape the prince; and yet he did not appear to pay it the slightest attention.

"But you don't seem to have any garden here," said he.

"The garden did me harm, monseigneur," answered Monsoreau.

The prince bit his lips and fell back on his chair.

"Do you know, count," said he, after a momentary silence, "that many people are asking the King for your office of grand huntsman?"

"And under what pretext, monseigneur?"

"They claim that you are dead."

"Monseigneur, you can answer that I am not, and I am sure you will."

"Really, I don't see that I can make any answer. You bury yourself here; therefore you must be dead."

It was now Monsoreau's turn to bite his lips.

"Well, be it so, monseigneur," said he, "if I have to lose my office, I must lose it."

"You don't care, then?"

"No, there are some things I prefer to it."

"You are a singularly disinterested man, Monsoreau," said the prince.

"I am so by character, monseigneur."

"If you are so by character, you will not mind the King's knowing your character."

"Who is to tell him?"

"Why, if he question me about the matter, I must, of course, repeat our conversation."

"By my faith, monseigneur, if everything were repeated to the King that is said in Paris, he would require more than two ears to listen to all that he would hear."

"And what, pray, is said in Paris, monsieur?" said the prince, turning round toward the count as quickly as if a serpent had stung him.

Monsoreau perceived the conversation had assumed a somewhat too serious aspect for a convalescent who could not yet be said to have much freedom of action. He suppressed the wrath which was seething in the depths of his soul, and, assuming an air of indifference:

"How should such a poor paralyzed creature as I know?" said he. "Events pass by me, and I scarcely discern their shadows. If the King is angry at seeing his work done badly by me, he is wrong."

"Why so?"

"Because, undoubtedly, my accident" —

"Well?"

"Was, to a certain extent, caused by him."

"Explain yourself."

"Explain myself! Is not M. de Saint-Luc, who wounded me, one of the dearest friends of the King? It was the King who showed him the secret lunge by means of which he ran me through the breast, and how do I know it was not the King who quietly sent him for the purpose of doing it."

The Duc d'Anjou made a gesture that almost meant assent.

"You are right," said he; "but, after all, the King is the King."

"Until he is king no longer; is not that so?" said Monsoreau.

The duke started.

"By the way," said he, "is not Madame de Monsoreau staying with you?"

"Monseigneur, she is ill at present; but for that, she would have already presented her very humble respects to your highness."

"Ill? Poor woman!"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"From grief at seeing your sufferings?"

"Yes, at first; then from the fatigue of moving."

"Let us hope her indisposition will be of short duration, my dear count. You have such a skilful physician."

And he rose from his seat.

"You are right, monseigneur," said Monsoreau. "My dear friend Rémy has treated me admirably."

"Why, that is the name of Bussy's doctor!"

"Yes, monseigneur; the count, in fact, gave him to me."

"Then you and Bussy have become friends?"

"He is my best, I ought rather to say, my only friend," replied Monsoreau, coldly.

"Adieu, count," said the prince, raising the damask hangings.

At the same instant, just as he was passing his head under the tapestry, he fancied he saw something like the skirt of a gown disappear in the next room, while, at the same time, Bussy rapidly made his way to his post in the middle of the corridor.

The suspicions of the duke grew stronger.

"We are starting," said he to Bussy.

Bussy did not answer, but ran down at once to give the escort orders to get ready, and, perhaps, also to hide from the prince the redness of his face.

The duke, now alone on the landing, tried to enter the corridor through which he had seen the silken dress disappear.

But, on turning, he observed that Monsoreau had followed him and was standing on the threshold, pale and leaning against the door-post.

"Your highness has mistaken your way," said he, coldly.

"You are right," stammered the duke. "Thanks."

And he went downstairs, with rage in his heart.

During their return — and the way was long — Bussy and he did not exchange a single word.

Bussy left the duke at the door of his hôtel.

As soon as the duke had entered his cabinet, and was alone, Aurilly glided into it also, with an air of great mystery.

"Well," said the duke, when he perceived him, "I have been actually jeered at by the husband!"

"And, perhaps, also by the lover, monseigneur," said the musician.

"What 's that you say?"

"The truth, your highness."

"Tell me all, then."

"Listen, monseigneur, I hope your highness will forgive me, as what I did was done for your service."

"Go on, I forgive you in advance."

"Well, then, after you had gone upstairs, I watched under a shed in the yard."

"Ah! and you saw" —

"A woman's dress; I saw this woman lean forward; I saw two arms twined round her neck; and, as my ear is well-trained, I heard the sound of a long and tender kiss."

"But who was the man?" asked the duke. "Did you recognize him?"

"I cannot recognize a man by his arms, monseigneur," said Aurilly; "gloves have no features."

"Yes, but you might recognize the gloves."

"Well, not exactly recognized," said Aurilly; "it seemed to me, however" —

"That you recognized them, did you not? Go on."

"But it is only a guess."

"No matter; continue."

"Well, then, monseigneur, they looked like M. de Bussy's gloves."

"Buff gloves, embroidered in gold, were they not?" cried the duke, from whose eyes suddenly vanished the cloud which, until now, had veiled the truth.

"Yes, buff gloves, embroidered in gold, monseigneur," repeated Aurilly.

"Ah! Bussy! yes, Bussy! it is Bussy," cried the duke. "Oh, I was blind, or rather, no, I was not blind, only I could not believe in such audacity."

"Take care," said Aurilly; "it seems to me your highness is speaking rather loud."

"Bussy!" repeated the duke once more, recalling a thousand circumstances that had passed unnoticed before, but which now assumed more and more significance as he recalled them.

"Still your highness ought not to believe too lightly; might there not have been a man concealed in Madame de Monsoreau's room?"

"Yes, doubtless; but Bussy, Bussy, who was in that corridor, would have seen him."

"It is true, monseigneur."

"And then, the gloves, the gloves."

"True also. And, besides, the sound of the kiss, I heard also" —

"What?"

"Three words."

"What were they?"

"These: 'Till to-morrow evening.'"

"Great heavens!"

"So that if we were to set out on an expedition like the one we were once engaged in, we could make sure."

"Aurilly, to-morrow evening we'll act as you suggest."

"Your highness knows I am at your orders."

"I know it. Ah, Bussy! Bussy!" he continued to repeat between his teeth; "Bussy, traitor to your lord! Bussy, the terror of every one! Bussy, the honest man! Bussy, who would not have me king of France!"

And the duke, smiling with an infernal joy, dismissed Aurilly, that he might reflect at his ease.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE WATCHERS.

Aurilly and the Duc d'Anjou kept their word to each other: the duke retained Bussy at his side as much as he was able during the day, so as not to lose sight of any of his movements.

Bussy asked for nothing better than to wait on the prince during the day; for, by doing so, he had his evening free.

His method of spending the evening, after being released, had become in him almost automatic.

At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and, with his rope-ladder under his arm, made his way in the direction of the Bastile.

The duke, who did not know that Bussy had a ladder in his antechamber, and could not believe that any one would walk alone in that way through the streets of Paris; the duke, who was sure that Bussy would call at his hôtel for a horse and a servant, lost ten minutes in preparations. During these ten minutes, Bussy, brisk and amorous, had already gone three-fourths of the distance.

Bussy was lucky, as bold people generally are; he met with no unpleasant accident on his way, and, as he drew near the house, he saw a light in one of the windows.

It was the signal agreed on between him and Diane.

Bussy's ladder was furnished with six hooks placed inversely, so that when thrown it was sure to fasten itself somewhere.

At the noise, Diane extinguished the light and opened the window to steady the ladder.

The thing was done in a moment.

Diane looked over the square, examining every nook and corner.

The square was apparently deserted.

Then she made a sign to Bussy to mount.

Bussy climbed the rungs two by two; there were ten; he got over them in five seconds.

The moment was happily chosen, for while Bussy was getting in at the window, M. de Monsoreau, who had been listening patiently at his wife's door for over ten minutes, was painfully descending the stairs, supported by the arm of a confidential

valet, who replaced Rémy, greatly to his master's advantage, every time dressings and salves were not in question.

This double manœuvre, which could have been planned by none but a skilful strategist, was executed with such promptitude that Monsoreau was opening the street door just at the very moment when Bussy had drawn up the ladder and Diane had closed the window.

Monsoreau went as far as the street; but, as we have said, the street was deserted, and he saw nothing.

"You must have been incorrectly informed," said Monsoreau to his domestic.

"No, monseigneur," replied the latter; "when I was leaving the Hôtel d'Anjou I was told in the most positive terms by the head groom, who is one of my friends, that his highness had ordered two horses for to-night. But perhaps, monseigneur, it was for the purpose of going somewhere else."

"Why, where else could he be going to?" said Monsoreau, gloomily.

The count was like all jealous people, who imagine the rest of the world have nothing to think of except to torment them.

He looked round a second time.

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had stayed in Diane's chamber," he murmured; "but, likely enough, they have signals for corresponding. She would have warned him of my presence, and I should have known nothing. Better to watch outside, as was arranged between us. Well, lead me to the hiding-place from which you say we can see everything."

"Come, monseigneur," said the valet.

Monsoreau advanced, leaning on the arm of his valet and supporting himself also by pressing his hand against the wall.

About twenty or twenty-five steps from the door, and near the Bastile, was an enormous heap of stones which had come from the ruins of demolished houses and were used as fortifications by the children of the quarter in those mimic battles that were probably relics of the days of Armagnacs and Burgundians.

In the middle of this heap of stones the valet had constructed a sort of sentry-box which could easily hold and hide two persons.

He spread a cloak over the stones, upon which Monsoreau crouched.

The valet knelt at the feet of the count.

A loaded musketoon was placed near them, to be used in case of emergency.

The valet was getting the match of the weapon ready. Monsoreau stopped him.

"Wait," said he, "there will be plenty of time. The game we are scenting is royal. The punishment for him who touches it is the rope."

And his eyes, inflamed as those of a wolf lurking in the neighborhood of a sheepfold, were fixed on Diane's window or pierced the depths of the faubourg and of the adjacent faubourgs, for he desired to surprise, and was afraid of being surprised.

Diane had prudently drawn her thick tapestry curtains so that scarcely a ray of light filtered through to show there was any life in this house that was plunged in such absolute darkness.

Monsoreau had hardly lain hidden ten minutes when two horses appeared at the opening of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The valet did not speak, but pointed his hand in the direction of the horses.

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I see."

The two cavaliers alighted at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles and fastened their horses to the iron rings placed in the wall for this purpose.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I believe we have come too late; he must have gone directly from your hôtel; he had an advantage of ten minutes over you and has entered."

"Granted," answered the prince; "but, though we may not see him go in, we 're sure to see him come out."

"Yes, but when?" said Aurilly.

"Whenever we wish," said the prince.

"Would it be showing too much curiosity to ask you how you intend to manage the matter, monseigneur?"

"In the easiest way in the world. One of us — I 'll let you do it — has but to knock at the door and inquire how M. de Monsoreau is getting along. Any sound frightens a lover. Then as you are getting in through the door, he 'll be getting out through the window, and, as I 'll remain outside, I 'm pretty sure to see him when he is taking to his heels."

"And Monsoreau?"

"What the devil can he have to object? He is my friend; I am so uneasy about him that I came to make inquiries, for I

thought he looked very ill when I saw him to-day; nothing more simple."

"Nothing could be more ingenious, monseigneur," said Aurilly.

"Do you hear what they are saying?" asked Monsoreau of his valet.

"No, monseigneur; but, if they continue speaking, we cannot fail to hear them, for they are coming in this direction."

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I see a heap of stones which seems expressly designed as a hiding-place for your highness."

"Yes, but wait; perhaps we may be able to see something through the curtains."

In fact, Diane had relit her lamp, and, as we mentioned before, a scarcely perceptible ray of light reached the outside. The duke and Aurilly turned this way and that in search of a spot from whence they could see into the interior of the apartment.

During these different evolutions, Monsoreau was fairly boiling with rage, and often laid a hand on the barrel of his musket, which was less cold than that hand.

"Oh! shall I endure this?" he murmured; "shall I swallow this insult also? No, no; so much the worse, but my patience is exhausted.

"God's death! am I not to be allowed to either sleep or keep awake or even suffer in tranquillity, because a shameful fancy has lodged in the idle brain of this dastard prince! No, I am not a complaisant lackey, I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and let him but come this way, and I swear by my sacred honor I will blow his brains out. Light the match, René, light the"—

At this very moment, just as the prince, finding that it was impossible to see into the chamber, had made up his mind to hide among the stones while Aurilly was knocking at the door, suddenly the latter, forgetful of the distance between him and the prince, laid his hand quickly on the arm of François.

"Eh! monsieur," said the astounded prince, "what is the matter?"

"Come away, monseigneur, come away," said Aurilly.

"But why?"

"Do you not see a gleam of light on your left? Come away, monseigneur, come."

"Yes, I see a spark among the stones."

"It is the match of a musket or arquebuse, monseigneur."

"Ah!" exclaimed the prince, "and who the devil can be lying in ambush there?"

"Some friend or servant of Bussy. Let us go away at once; we can round a corner and return from another direction. The servant is now sure to give the alarm and we'll then see Bussy come out of the window."

"Upon my word, you're right," said the prince, "come."

Both crossed the street and went to the place where their horses were tied.

"They are going away," said the valet.

"Yes," answered Monsoreau. "Did you recognize them?"

"In my opinion, at least, they were the Duc d'Anjou and Aurilly."

"Right. But I'll be absolutely certain in a moment."

"What are you about to do, monseigneur?"

"Come!"

Meanwhile, the duke and Aurilly were passing the Rue Sainte-Catherine, intending to skirt the gardens and return by the Boulevard de la Bastille.

Monsoreau went home and ordered his litter to be got ready.

What the duke had foretold happened.

Bussy was alarmed by the noise made by Monsoreau: the light was again extinguished, the window again opened, the ladder again fastened, and Bussy, to his great regret, had to fly like Romeo, but without having, like Romeo, seen the sun rise and heard the lark sing.

Just at the moment when his feet touched the ground and Diane threw him the ladder, the duke and Aurilly reached the corner of the Bastile.

They saw distinctly a shadow, suspended between earth and sky, beneath the window of the fair Diane. But this shadow vanished almost immediately at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul.

"Monseigneur," said the valet, "we shall wake up the entire house."

"What is that to me?" answered Monsoreau; "I am master in my own house, I presume, and have, at least, the right to do what the Duc d'Anjou wished to do."

The litter was now ready. Monsoreau sent for two of his servants, who were lodging in the Rue des Tournelles and had

been his principal attendants ever since the day upon which he had been wounded. When they had arrived and taken their places, one at each portière, the machine, drawn by two robust horses, started at a brisk trot and, in less than a quarter of an hour, was in front of the gate of the Hôtel d'Anjou.

The duke and Aurilly had so recently returned that their horses were not yet unsaddled.

Monsoreau, who was one of those privileged to visit the prince at any time, appeared on the threshold, just as the duke, after throwing his hat on a chair, was stretching out his boots to a valet to pull off.

Another valet announced the grand huntsman, preceding him by only a few steps.

A thunderbolt shattering the windows in the prince's apartment could not have astonished him more than the words just heard.

"M. de Monsoreau!" he cried, with an anxiety that could be easily discerned in his pallor and in the trembling of his voice.

"Yes, monseigneur, myself," said the count, restraining, or, rather, trying to restrain, the violent emotion that shook him.

He made such desperate efforts to control his feelings that his legs gave way under him, and he fell on a chair that stood near the entrance to the chamber.

"Why, my dear friend," said the duke, "you will kill yourself. You are so pale that you seem on the point of fainting."

"Oh, I shall not faint, monseigneur. The matters I have to confide to your highness are too important to allow me to do so — at least now. Perhaps I shall faint afterward."

"Well, speak, my dear count," said François, quite overcome.

"But not before your people, I presume," said Monsoreau.

The duke dismissed every one, even Aurilly.

The two men were alone.

"Your highness has just returned?"

"As you see, count."

"It is very imprudent of your highness to frequent the streets in this fashion during the night."

"Who told you I had been in the streets?"

"Why, the dust that covers your clothes, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau," said the prince, in a tone there could be no mistaking, "do you really hold a second office, besides that of grand huntsman?"

"That of spy? Yes, monseigneur. Every one follows that calling now, more or less, and I, like the rest."

"And what does your profession bring you, monsieur?"

"The knowledge of what is passing."

"A curious trade," remarked the prince, edging nearer to the bell, so that he might have it within his reach, if he found it necessary to ring.

"A curious trade, indeed," said Monsoreau.

"Well, tell me what you have to say."

"That is the purpose for which I came."

"Will you permit me to be seated?"

"No irony, monseigneur, toward a true and faithful friend like me — a friend who comes at this hour and in this condition because he wants to render you a signal service. If I have ventured to take a seat, it was because, upon my honor, I was unable to stand."

"A service," inquired the duke, "a service?"

"Yes."

"Speak, then."

"Monseigneur, I came to your highness on behalf of a mighty prince."

"On the part of the King?"

"No, on the part of Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

"Ah!" said the prince; "on the part of the Duc de Guise; that is another matter. Approach, and speak low."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU SIGNED, AND HOW, AFTER SIGNING, HE SPOKE.

THE Duc d'Anjou and Monsoreau were silent for a moment. The duke was the first to break this silence.

"Well, then, M. le Comte," he asked, "what have you to say to me on the part of the Guises?"

"Much, monseigneur."

"They have written to you, then?"

"Oh, no; they never write, never since the strange disappearance of Maître Nicolas David."

"Then you must have gone to the army."

"No, monseigneur; but they have come to Paris."

"The Guises in Paris?" cried the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And I have not seen them!"

"They are too prudent to expose either themselves or your highness to any danger."

"And no one gave me notice of their arrival!"

"Oh, yes, monseigneur, I have done so."

"But what is their purpose in coming?"

"Purpose, monseigneur? Why, to keep the appointment you made with them."

"I! I made an appointment with them?"

"Undoubtedly; on the very day your highness was arrested you received a letter from M. de Guise, and replied to it verbally, through me, that they were to come to Paris between the thirty-first of May and the second of June. It is now the thirty-first of May, and, as you see, if you have forgotten them, they have not forgotten you, monseigneur."

François turned pale.

So many events had occurred since then that he had forgotten the appointment, notwithstanding its importance.

"True," said he; "but the relations existing between the Guises and me at that time exist no longer."

"If that be the case, monseigneur," answered the count, "you would do well to inform them of the fact, for I believe they are of quite a different opinion."

"How so?"

"You may think you are under no responsibility to them; but they are sure they labor under a great responsibility to you."

"A trap, my dear count, a snare in which such a man as I am does not allow himself to be caught twice."

"And where, monseigneur, were you caught once?"

"Where? Where was I caught? In the Louvre, *mordieu!*"

"Was that the fault of the Guises?"

"I do not say it was," murmured the duke; "I do not say it was; but I do say that they did nothing to help me to escape."

"That would have been difficult, since they were flying themselves."

"That is true," muttered the duke.

"But, once you were in Anjou, did they not commission me to inform you that you might always rely on them as they

relied on you, and that on the day you marched on Paris, they would march by your side."

"True again," said the duke; "but I have not marched on Paris."

"Of course not, for you are in Paris."

"Yes; but I am in Paris as my brother's ally."

"Monseigneur will permit me to observe that he is more the ally of the Guises than of his brother."

"How can that be so?"

"Monseigneur is their accomplice."

The Duc d'Anjou bit his lips.

"And you say they commissioned you to announce their arrival to me?"

"Yes, your highness, they did me that honor."

"And have they told you why they returned?"

"They have told me everything, monseigneur, — all their purposes and plans, — because they knew I was your highness's confidential agent."

"So they have plans? What are they?"

"The same, always."

"And they think them practicable?"

"They think their success assured."

"And the object of these plans is still" —

The duke paused; he did not dare to pronounce the words that should naturally follow those already uttered.

Monsoreau completed the idea in the duke's mind.

"To make you king of France; yes, monseigneur."

The duke felt his cheeks grow red from the joy that thrilled him.

"But," he inquired, "is the moment favorable?"

"Your wisdom must decide."

"My wisdom?"

"Yes; I shall place before you certain facts, obvious and unanswerable facts."

"Let us hear them."

"The nomination of the King as head of the League was only a farce, speedily recognized as such, and condemned as soon as it was recognized. Now there is a reaction, and the entire state is ready to rise against the tyranny of the King and of his creatures. Every sermon is a call to arms, every church a place where people curse the King instead of praying to God. The army is boiling over with impatience, the

citizens are forming associations, our agents are constantly gaining fresh signatures and adhesions to the League; in short, the reign of Valois is approaching its end. In such a crisis, the Guises need to have at hand a serious claimant to the crown, and their choice has naturally fallen upon you. Are you ready now to surrender your former aspirations?"

The duke did not answer.

"Well?" asked Monsoreau, "what is your highness thinking of doing?"

"Faith," answered the prince, "I am thinking" —

"You know, monseigneur, that you may speak to me with the utmost frankness."

"I am thinking that my brother has no children, that I am his successor, and that his health is precarious; why, therefore, should I help these people to stir up revolts, why should I compromise my name, my dignity, my family affection, by a useless rivalry; why, in a word, should I attempt to seize, at my peril, a throne that must be mine without any danger?"

"That is just where the error of your highness lies," said Monsoreau; "you can have your brother's throne, but only by seizing it. MM. de Guise cannot be kings themselves; but they will have no king except one of their own making; the king they had reckoned on as a substitute for the reigning sovereign was your highness; but, should you refuse to be that king, I warn you they will seek another."

"And who, pray," cried the Duc d'Anjou, with a frown, "would dare to seat himself on the throne of Charlemagne?"

"A Bourbon instead of a Valois; a son of Saint Louis instead of a son of Saint Louis; the matter is quite simple, monseigneur."

"The King of Navarre?" exclaimed François.

"Why not? he is young and brave. He has no children, it is true; but he surely may have them."

"He is a Huguenot."

"He! Was he not converted the night of Saint Bartholomew?"

"Yes, but he has since abjured."

"Ah! monseigneur, what he did for his life he will do for a throne."

"So they believe, do they, that I will surrender my rights without a struggle?"

"I think that contingency is provided for."

"I will make a strong fight against them."

"What of that? they are men of war."

"I will put myself at the head of the League."

"They are its soul."

"I will unite with my brother."

"Your brother will be dead."

"I will summon the kings of Europe to my help."

"The kings of Europe will be ready enough to make war on kings; they will think twice before making war on a people."

"How, on a people?"

"Undoubtedly; the Guises have planned out everything, are ready even to form France into states, are ready even for a republic."

François wrung his hands in anguish. Monsoreau was terrible with these unanswerable answers of his.

"A republic?" he murmured.

"Yes; like Switzerland, Genoa, Venice."

"But my party will not allow France to be turned into a republic."

"Your party?" inquired Monsoreau. "Why, monseigneur, owing to your disinterestedness and magnanimity, I believe, upon my soul, that your party now consists solely of M. de Bussy and myself."

The duke could not repress a sinister smile.

"I am bound to the Guises, then?" said he.

"Well, somewhat, monseigneur."

"But, if I am so powerless as you say, what can they want with me?"

"Because, monseigneur, while you can do nothing without the Guises, you can do everything with them."

"I can do everything with them?"

"Yes, say but the word and you are king."

The duke rose, in great agitation; he walked about the room, and as he walked, fingered everything in his way: curtains, hangings, table-covers; at length he paused in front of Monsoreau.

"You told the truth, count," said he, "when you declared I had only two friends now: you and Bussy."

He uttered these words with a benevolent smile; his progress round the room had given him time to substitute it for the look of pale fury that was on his face before.

"So, then?" asked Monsoreau, a gleam of joy in his eyes.

"So, then, my faithful servant," returned the duke, "speak; I am all attention."

"You bid me speak, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"Well! in two words, this is the plan, monseigneur."

The duke turned pale again, but he paused to listen.

The count resumed:

"In a week we shall have the festival of Corpus Christi, monseigneur, shall we not?"

"Yes."

"The King has been long organizing a great procession to all the chief convents in Paris on that holyday, has he not?"

"It is his custom to have such processions every year at that period."

"Then, as your highness will remember, the King is without guards, or, at least, his guards remain outside the door. He halts before each *reposoir*,[1] kneels, says five *Paters* and five *Aves*, and, afterward, the Seven Penitential Psalms."

"I know all that."

"He will go to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, as well as to the others."

"Perfectly correct."

"Only, as an accident will occur in front of the convent" —

"An accident?"

"Yes, a sewer will have fallen in during the night."

"Well?"

"Consequently the *reposoir* cannot be left under the porch; it will have to be removed to the courtyard."

"Go on."

"Pay close attention: the King, with four or five others, will enter; but, when they are inside, the gates will be closed."

"And then?"

"Well, then, — your highness is acquainted with the monks who will do the honors of the abbey to his Majesty?"

"They will be the same" —

"Who were present when your highness was crowned."

"They will dare to lay their hands on the Lord's anointed?"

"Yes, but only to tonsure him; you know the quatrain" —

"'You flung off the first crown you have worn,
Sneaked away, left your people to ruin.
The crown you wear now shall be torn
From your head. Shears will give you a new one.'"

[1] Temporary altar erected for religious processions.

"They will dare to do that!" he cried, his eyes shining with avidity, "dare to touch the head of a king!"

"Oh, he will not be king then."

"Why not?"

"Did you never hear of a Genevievan monk who fills up the time before he is to perform miracles with preaching sermons?"

"Brother Gorenflot?"

"The same."

"The fellow who wanted to preach the League, with his arquebuse on his shoulder?"

"The same. Well, the King will be conducted to his cell; once there, the brother undertakes to force him to sign his abdication; then, after the abdication, Madame de Montpensier will enter with a pair of shears or scissors in her hand. They have been purchased already, and she wears them now at her side. They are very beautiful, made of massive gold and admirably chased; nothing can be too good for a king."

François did not utter a word; his shifty eyes were dilated like those of a cat lying in wait for her prey in the dark.

"You understand the rest, monseigneur," continued the count.

"A proclamation will be issued to the people, announcing that the King, moved by a holy desire to repent of his sins, intends to remain in the convent. Should any one doubt the reality of the King's vocation, well, M. de Guise controls the army; M. de Mayenne, the citizens; and M. le Cardinal, the church; with these three forces under your hand, you may make the people believe almost anything."

"But they will accuse me of violence," said the duke, after a pause.

"You need not be there at all."

"They will regard me as a usurper."

"Monseigneur forgets the abdication."

"The King will refuse."

"It seems Brother Gorenflot is a man of great strength as well as a man of great intellect."

"They have decided, then, on the plan?"

"Yes."

"And they are not afraid that I may reveal it?"

"No, monseigneur, for, in case you betray them, they have a plan quite as easy of execution, but it would be directed against you."

"Ah!" exclaimed François.

"Yes, monseigneur. I am not acquainted with it, as they know I am too much your friend to trust me in such a case. All I know is that it exists."

"Then I surrender, count; what am I to do?"

"Approve."

"Well, I approve."

"Yes; but it is not enough to approve by word of mouth."

"And what other kind of approval is required?"

"By writing."

"They must be mad to think I would consent to such a thing."

"And why?"

"Suppose the conspiracy fail?"

"It is in view of such a possible failure that they ask for your signature, monseigneur."

"They wish to make my name a sort of bulwark for themselves, do they?"

"Nothing else."

"Then I refuse a thousand times."

"You cannot do so now."

"I cannot do so now?"

"No."

"Are you mad?"

"To refuse now would be to betray."

"How?"

"Because I asked nothing better than to be silent, and, if I spoke, it was in obedience to the orders of your highness."

"Well, be it so; let these gentlemen take it as they like; at least, as I have a choice of dangers, I'll choose whatever danger I wish."

"Monseigneur, beware of choosing badly."

"I will risk it," said François, somewhat disturbed, but making an effort to keep cool.

"For your own interest, I advise you not to do so."

"But if I sign, I compromise myself."

"If you refuse to sign, you do worse: you become a party to your own murder."

François shuddered.

"Would they dare?" said he.

"They will dare everything. The conspirators have advanced too far; they must succeed at any price."

HE TOCK, OR RATHER, TORE, THE PEN FROM THE COUNT'S HAND AND SIGNED.

The duke fell into a state of indecision easy to understand.

"I will sign," said he.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow? No, monseigneur; if you sign, you must sign immediately."

"But MM. de Guise have to draw up the agreement I am to sign in connection with them."

"It is drawn up already, monseigneur; I have it with me."

Monsoreau drew a paper from his pocket: it was a full and entire adhesion to the scheme with which we are already acquainted.

The duke read it from end to end, and the count could see that, as he read, he turned pale; when he had finished, his legs failed him, and he sat, or rather fell, down on the chair before the table.

"Take this, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, handing him a pen.

"Must I sign, then?" said François, pressing his hand to his forehead, for he felt as if his head was turning.

"You must if you wish; no one forces you."

"But if no one force me, there are some who threaten me with assassination."

"I do not threaten you, monseigneur, God forbid; I warn you. That is quite a different thing."

"Give it," said the duke.

And, as if making an effort over himself, he took, or rather, tore, the pen from the count's hand and signed.

Monsoreau watched him with an eye burning with hate and hope; when he saw him put pen to paper, he had to lean on the table; his eyes seemed to dilate as the duke formed the letters that composed his name.

"Ah!" cried he, when the duke had finished.

And seizing the paper with a movement as violent as that with which the duke had seized the pen, he folded it, hid it between his shirt and the silken habiliment that did duty for a waistcoat at the time, buttoned his doublet, and wrapped his cloak over it.

The duke stared at him in amazement; he could read nothing on that face, across which a gleam of ferocious joy had just flashed.

"And now, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, "be prudent."

"In what way?"

"Give up running about the streets with Aurilly, as you have been doing awhile ago."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, monseigneur, that to-night you persecuted with your love a woman whom her husband adores, a woman of whom he is so jealous that, by my faith, he is determined to kill any one who approaches her without his permission."

"May I ask is it of yourself and your wife that you are really speaking?"

"Yes, monseigneur, since you have guessed so correctly at the first trial I will not deny it. I have married Diane de Méridor; she is mine, and no one shall have her, at least, as long as I am living, not even a prince!"

He almost touched with his poniard the breast of the prince, who started back.

"Monsieur, you threaten me," said François, pale with fury.

"No, my prince, I only warn you, as I did a moment ago."

"Warn me of what?"

"That no one shall have my wife."

"And I, you double-dyed fool," cried the Duc d'Anjou, beside himself with rage, "tell you your warning comes too late, for some one has had her already."

Monsoreau uttered a terrible cry and buried his hands in his hair.

"It was not you," he stammered, "it was not you, monseigneur?"

And he held his poniard in such a way that with a single thrust he could stab the prince to the heart.

François recoiled.

"You are mad, count," preparing to strike the bell.

"No, I see clearly, speak sensibly, and understand correctly. You have just said that some one has possessed my wife; you said so."

"I repeat it."

"Name this person, and prove the fact."

"Who was hidden to-night, about twenty yards from your house, with a musket?"

"I."

"Well, count, during that time"—

"During that time"—

"A man was in your house, or rather, in your wife's room."

"You saw him enter?"

"No, I saw him come out."

"By the door?"

"By the window."

"You recognized the man?"

"Yes."

"Name him," cried Monsoreau, "name him, monseigneur, or I cannot answer for myself."

The duke passed his hand over his forehead and something like a smile flitted across his lips.

"M. le Comte," said he, "on my honor as a prince of the blood, on my soul and before God, within a week I will make you acquainted with the man who possesses your wife."

"You swear it?" cried Monsoreau.

"I swear it."

"Well, monseigneur, in a week," said Monsoreau, striking the part of his breast upon which lay the paper, "in a week, or, — you understand?"

"Return in a week; that is all I have to say to you."

"After all, that is better," said Monsoreau. "In a week I shall be well, and he who is eager for vengeance needs all his strength."

He passed out, making a gesture that was more threatening than valedictory.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A PROMENADE AT LES TOURNELLES.

MEANWHILE the Angevine gentlemen had gradually returned to Paris.

It cannot be said, however, that they returned with confidence. They knew the King and the King's brother and mother too well to hope that everything would end in a family embrace.

They never forgot how they had been chased by the King's friends, and had not the slightest expectation that a triumphal entry would be allotted to them as a sort of reparation for that rather disagreeable incident.

And so their return was marked by a certain degree of timidity; they stole into the city, armed to the teeth, were

ready to fire on the slightest provocation, and before arriving at the Hôtel d'Anjou drew their swords at least fifty times on innocent tradesmen whose sole crime was that of looking at them as they passed by.

Antraguet, especially, was the most ferocious of them all, and laid all the imaginary insults they received to the account of the King's minions, comforting himself with the thought that whenever the opportunity arose he should have a few very significant words to say to them.

He imparted his purpose to Ribeirac, a man of proved sagacity, who replied that whenever he indulged in such a pleasure he should take care to have a frontier or two at hand.

"I 'll try to do so," answered Antraguet.

The duke gave them a cordial welcome.

They were his men, just as MM. de Maugiron, Schomberg, Quélus, and D'Épernon were the King's.

He began by saying:

"My friends, there are people here who are just a little bit in the humor for killing you. I know the wind sets in that quarter. Look out for yourselves."

"We have done so, monseigneur," answered Antraguet; "but ought we not to offer our very humble respects to his Majesty? For to hide ourselves would really do no great honor to Anjou. How does it strike your highness?"

"You are right," said the duke, "go, and, if you like, I will go along with you."

The three young men looked inquiringly at one another. At this moment Bussy entered the hall and embraced his friends.

"Why," said he, "you have been awfully late! But what is this I hear? Monseigneur proposing to go and get himself killed in the Louvre like Cæsar in the Roman senate! Only think of what the pleasure of the minions would be if they could each carry away a little bit of his highness under their cloaks!"

"But, my dear friend," said Antraguet, "the very thing we want is just to have a little fling at these fellows."

Bussy did not think the time had come to tell them of the proposed duel.

"Oh," said he, "as to that, we 'll see, we 'll see."

The duke observed him very attentively.

"Let us go to the Louvre," said Bussy, "but by ourselves.

Monseigneur will stay in his garden and amuse himself by knocking off the heads of the poppies."

François pretended to laugh in merry protest, but the fact was he was pleased to be relieved of an irksome task.

The Angevines were arrayed in great splendor.

They were high and mighty lords who joyously squandered the revenues derived from the paternal acres in silks, velvets, and laces.

The whole four of them, when together, presented a dazzling spectacle of gold, precious stones, and magnificent brocades. They were cheered on the way by the people, who, with their usual infallible instinct, detected under these fine costumes hearts on fire with hatred for the minions.

Henri III. refused to receive these gentlemen from Anjou, and they waited vainly in the gallery.

It was Maugiron, Quélus, Schomberg, and D'Épernon who brought them the tidings of the King's refusal, which they did with the most courteous salutations and with expressions of the most profound regret.

"Ah, messires," said Antraguet, "this is sad news indeed! but coming from your lips it loses half its bitterness."

"Gentlemen," said Schomberg, "you are the very pink of grace and courtesy. Would it be agreeable to you to make up for the reception which you have missed by enjoying a little promenade?"

"Oh! gentlemen, we were just on the point of requesting that favor," was the quick answer of Antraguet, though Bussy touched his arm lightly, saying:

"Silence, if you please, and let them alone."

"I wonder where we should go," said Quélus, as if in doubt.

"I know a charming spot near the Bastile," replied Schomberg.

"Gentlemen, we follow you," said Ribeirac; "pray take the lead."

And the King's four friends passed out of the Louvre, followed by the four Angevines, and marched along the quays to the old paddock of Les Tournelles, then the Marché-aux-Chevaux; it formed a sort of square, perfectly level, with a few poor-looking trees scattered here and there, and fences which served to keep the horses inside and to which they were also tied.

The young gentlemen walked arm in arm, lavishing on one

another every sort of civility and conversing in the most gay and sprightly fashion, to the stupefaction of the good citizens, who began to regret their late hurrahs and to say that the Angevines had made a covenant with the swine of Herodes!

On arriving, Quélus said:

"You could n't find a nicer or a lonelier spot for the purpose, and what a capital footing the ground gives!"

"Faith, you 're right," answered Antraguet, stamping the earth several times.

"Well," continued Quélus, "these gentlemen and I have been thinking, knowing your politeness, that you would accompany us hither, one of these days, and second, tierce, and quarte M. de Bussy, your friend, who has done us the honor of challenging us all four."

"It is true," said Bussy to his astounded companions.

"And he never said a word about it!" cried Antraguet.

"Oh, M. de Bussy is a gentleman who knows the value of words," retorted Quélus. "Would you deign to accept, gentlemen of Anjou?"

"Accept? Why, of course," cried the three Angevines together. "We are delighted at so great an honor."

"Nothing could be better," said Schomberg, rubbing his hands. "And now if it be agreeable to you, let each select his adversary."

"I am perfectly willing," answered Ribeirac, with flaming eyes; "and, after that" —

"No," interrupted Bussy, "that would not be fair. We are all actuated by the same feelings; therefore we are inspired by God. God, I assure you, gentlemen, is the author of human ideas. Then leave to God the task of settling the matter. And, besides, should we agree that the first who kills or mortally wounds his antagonist shall be at liberty to attack the others" —

"Yes! yes!" cried the minions, "that is what we wish" —

"The more reason, then, that we should act like the Horatii, and draw lots."

"Are you sure the Horatii drew lots?" asked Quélus, thoughtfully.

"I have every reason to believe so," replied Bussy.

"Then let us imitate them."

"A moment," said Bussy. "Before knowing who are to be our antagonists, let us agree on the rules of combat. It

would be highly indecorous to make these rules only after the selection of opponents."

"Oh, the matter is simple enough," said Schomberg, "we will fight until death ensues."

"Doubtless; but how are we to fight?" asked Quélus.

"With sword and dagger," answered Bussy; "we all have had good practice at both."

"On foot?" said Quélus.

"Yes, our movements will be freer; why should we bother about horses?"

"On foot, then."

"On what day?"

"Why, as soon as possible."

"No," said D'Épernon, "I have a thousand matters to settle, and a will to make. Excuse me, but I prefer a little delay — A delay of three or four or six days will sharpen our appetites for the affair."

"Spoken like a hero," said Bussy, somewhat ironically.

"Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Livarot; "we 're getting along beautifully."

"Let us draw lots, then," said Bussy.

"Just a word," said Antraguet; "I propose this: let us divide the ground fairly. As the names will be drawn two by two, let us chalk out four compartments, one for each pair."

"Well said."

"I propose for number one the long square between the two lime-trees yonder; it 's a lovely spot."

"Agreed."

"But the sun?"

"Yes," said another, "the second would be turned to the east."

"No, no, gentlemen," said Bussy; "such an arrangement would be unfair. We may kill, but we must not assassinate one another. Let us draw a semicircle; in this way the sun will strike us all obliquely."

Bussy showed how they were to stand if his proposal were accepted; then the names were drawn.

The first that came out was that of Schomberg; the second that of Ribeirac. They were to be the first pair.

Quélus and Antraguet were the second.

Livarot and Maugiron were the third.

When Bussy heard the name of Quélus, whom he had hoped to have for an adversary, he frowned.

When D'Épernon heard his name coupled with Bussy's, he turned pale and had to pull his mustache very hard to call up some color in his cheeks.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bussy, "until the day of the combat we belong to one another. We are friends, be it for life or death. Will you do me the honor of dining with me at the Hôtel de Bussy?"

All bowed in token of assent and proceeded to the residence of Bussy, where a sumptuous banquet kept them together until daybreak.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

IN WHICH CHICOT FALLS ASLEEP.

All these movements of the Angevines had attracted the King's notice first, then Chicot's.

The King remained inside the Louvre, waiting impatiently for the return of his friends from their promenade with the gentlemen of Anjou.

Chicot had followed the party at a distance, had examined the situation with the sagacity for which he was preëminently distinguished, and, after seeing enough to be convinced of the purpose of Bussy and Quélus, had turned back and gone to the dwelling of Monsoreau.

Monsoreau was cunning, beyond a doubt, but not cunning enough to throw dust in the eyes of Chicot. The Gascon brought many a message of condolence from the King, and so it was impossible for the grand huntsman to receive him otherwise than courteously.

Chicot found Monsoreau in bed.

His visit to the duke the night before had completely relaxed the springs of an organization not yet restored to its former vigor, and Rémy, with his chin in his hand, was watching fretfully the first attacks of the fever that threatened to seize its victim a second time.

Still, he was able to talk and even to conceal, to some extent, his hatred of the Duc d'Anjou so skilfully that any other than Chicot might not have suspected its existence. But

his very reticence and discretion helped the Gascon to fathom his thoughts.

"The fact of the matter is," thought Chicot, "no one would express such devotion to M. d'Anjou as he does, without having some underhand motive for doing so."

Chicot, who had had a good deal of experience in the matter of invalids, wanted to find out whether the count's fever was not a farce, somewhat like that played once upon a time by M. Nicolas David.

However, when he observed the expression of Rémy's face as he felt the patient's pulse he said to himself:

"The man is really ill. He is not fit for any enterprise. Now let us see what M. de Bussy is doing."

And he ran to the Hôtel de Bussy, which was in a blaze of light and plunged in savory odors that would have drawn from Gorenflot exclamations of ecstatic delight.

"Is the festival for M. de Bussy's marriage?" he asked a lackey.

"No, monsieur," replied the latter; "M. de Bussy has become reconciled with several noblemen of the court, and they are celebrating the reconciliation by a banquet, and such a banquet! There never was the like of it!"

"Unless he should poison them, and I know Bussy is incapable of such a trick as that," thought Chicot, "there's no danger for his Majesty in this direction."

He returned to the Louvre and went to the armory, in which Henri was walking up and down, cursing and swearing at a great rate.

The King had sent three couriers for Quélus, and as neither he nor his companions saw any reason why his Majesty should be so uneasy, they had stopped on their return from Bussy's at the house of M. de Birague, where every one in the livery of the King was sure to find a full glass, a slice of ham, and preserved fruit.

It was the method adopted by the Biragues to keep in favor at court.

When Chicot appeared at the door of Henri's cabinet, the latter uttered a loud cry.

"Oh! my dear friend," he said, "do you know what is become of them?"

"Of whom? Your minions?"

"Alas! yes, my poor friends!"

"They must lie very low by this time," answered Chicot.

"They have killed them!" cried Henri, leaping up, a threatening look in his eyes; "they are dead!"

"Dead, I am afraid that they are" —

"You know it and you laugh, pagan!"

"Have patience, my son. Yes, dead, dead drunk."

"Oh! you mountebank, how you frightened me! But why are you always calumniating these gentlemen?"

"On the contrary, I 'm always eulogizing them."

"You are always jeering — come, try and be serious, I beg. You know they went out with the Angevines?"

"I should think I know it!"

"Well, with what result?"

"With the result I mentioned: they are dead drunk, or very near it."

"But Bussy, Bussy?"

"Bussy is fuddling them; he 's a very dangerous man."

"For mercy's sake, Chicot!"

"What! am I not right? Bussy is giving them a dinner, I tell you, giving your friends a dinner. How do you like that, my son? eh?"

"Bussy giving them a dinner! Oh, impossible; they are sworn enemies."

"Exactly; if they were friends they would n't need to get drunk together. Listen, how are your legs?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you able to walk to the river?"

"I would walk to the end of the world to witness such a thing."

"You need n't go so far; go to the Hôtel de Bussy and you 'll see this miracle!"

"You 'll come with me?"

"Thanks, I am just from there."

"But, Chicot" —

"No, no; don't you understand that I who have seen the whole thing do not require to be convinced? Besides, my legs are three inches shorter than they were yesterday; I have driven them into my belly by walking so much. If I go on at this gait, my legs will soon begin at the knees. Go yourself, my son, go."

The King flashed an angry glance at him.

"It is very good-natured of you," said Chicot, "to fly into a

passion for the sake of these people. They laugh and make merry and intrigue against your government. In such an emergency, it behooveth us, my Henri, to withstand them like the philosophers we are; they laugh, let us laugh; they dine, have something good and hot served up at once; they intrigue, let us go to bed after supper."

The King could not help smiling.

"Then you will have the proud consolation," continued Chicot, "of knowing that you are a true sage. France has had her long-haired kings, her bold king, her great king, her slothful kings; I 'm sure they 'll call you Henri the Patient — Ah! my son, patience is such a beautiful virtue — especially in a person who does n't happen to have any other!"

"Betrayed!" said the King to himself, "betrayed — these people have n't even the manners of gentlemen."

"Aha! aha! so you 're troubled on account of your friends still, are you?" cried Chicot, pushing the King before him into the hall in which supper had been just served, "you first bewail them as dead, and, when you are told they are not dead, you are as tearful and troubled as ever. Henri, you 'll always be a whimperer."

"You try my patience too much, M. Chicot."

"Come, now, try and be a little consistent; would you rather see each of them with seven or eight rapier-thrusts in his stomach?"

"I should like to be able to rely on my friends," said Henri, in a gloomy voice.

"Oh, *ventre de biche!* rely on me, I am still with you, my son; but you 'll have to feed me. Please, some pheasant — and truffles," he added, stretching out his plate.

Henri and his only friend went to bed early, the King sighing because his heart was so empty, Chicot breathless because his stomach was so full.

The next day MM. de Quélus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and D'Épernon presented themselves at the *petit lever* of the King; the usher opened the portière for the gentlemen, as he was in the habit of doing.

Chicot was still sleeping; the King had been unable to sleep. He jumped from his bed in a rage, and, tearing off the perfumed cloths that covered his cheeks and hands:

"Begone!" he cried, "begone!"

The usher, completely taken aback, explained to the young

men that the King dismissed them. They stared at one another, in bewilderment.

"But, sire," stammered Quélus, "we wanted to tell your Majesty" —

"That you are no longer drunk," shouted Henri, "eh?"

Chicot opened an eye.

"Excuse me, sire," said Quélus, gravely, "your Majesty is mistaken."

"And yet I haven't drunk the wine of Anjou, I haven't!"

"Ah, very good, very good, indeed!" said Quèlus, with a smile, "I understand now — Well" —

"Well! — well what?"

"If your Majesty will remain alone with us, we will tell you."

"I hate drunkards and traitors."

"Sire!" cried the three gentlemen in chorus.

"Patience, gentlemen," said Quélus, interrupting them; "his Majesty slept badly and has had a nightmare. Just a word with him, and our highly venerated prince will be thoroughly awake."

This impertinent apology, made by a subject for his king, impressed Henri. He conjectured that people who were bold enough to utter such words could hardly have done anything dishonorable.

"Speak," said he, "and be brief."

"If I can, sire, but I shall find it difficult."

"Yes — it is natural to turn and twist when certain accusations are made."

"No, sire; on the contrary, it is natural to go straight to the point," answered Quélus, looking at Chicot and the usher in a manner that was a repetition of his request for a private audience.

At a sign from the King, the usher bowed himself out. Chicot opened the other eye and said:

"Don't mind me, I sleep like a log."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

IN WHICH CHICOT WAKES.

When it was seen that Chicot was such a conscientious sleeper, nobody troubled his head about him.

Besides, it had become a custom to consider Chicot as a piece of furniture belonging to the King's bedchamber.

"Your Majesty," said Quélus, inclining, "knows only half of the matter, and that half the least interesting one. Assuredly, — and no one has the least intention of denying it, — assuredly, we have dined with M. de Bussy, and I must even say, to the credit of his cook, that we have dined well."

"There was a certain Austrian or Hungarian wine, especially," said Schomberg, "that, in my opinion, was simply a wonder!"

"Oh! that growling German!" interrupted the King; "he 's fond of wine, I always suspected it."

"And I was always sure of it," said Chicot. "I have seen him drunk a score of times."

Schomberg wheeled round and faced him.

"Pay no attention, my son," said the Gascon, "the King will tell you I talk in my sleep."

Schomberg turned again to the King.

"By my faith, sire," said he, "I conceal neither my likes nor dislikes; good wine is good."

"We ought not to call a thing good which makes us forget our sovereign," said the King, quietly.

Schomberg was about to reply, doubtless unwilling to abandon so excellent a cause, when Quélus made a sign to him.

"You are right," said Schomberg, "go on."

"I was saying, then, sire," continued Quélus, "that during the banquet, and particularly after it, we had some most interesting and serious conversations, dealing, for the most part, with the interests of your Majesty."

"Your exordium is rather long," said Henri, "that is a bad sign."

"*Ventre de biche!* what a babbler this Valois of ours is!" cried Chicot.

"I say, Master Gascon!" said Henri, haughtily, "if you 're not asleep, get out of here."

"Hang it, man! if I 'm not asleep, it 's because you won't let me; your tongue rattles like the clappers on a Good Friday."

Quélus, seeing that it was impossible to talk seriously, no matter how serious the subject might be, in this royal abode where frivolity had grown to be a habit, sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and rose, evidently much annoyed.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, mincingly, "the matters Quélus is trying to bring before you are very grave, I assure you."

"Grave?" repeated Henri.

"Undoubtedly," said Quélus. "That is, if the lives of eight brave gentlemen seem to your Majesty a subject worthy of your Majesty's serious attention."

"What does this mean?" cried the King.

"This means that I am waiting until the King deign to listen to me."

"I am listening, my son, I am listening," answered Henri, laying a hand on Quélus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, I was saying that we talked seriously, and this is the result of our conversation: royalty is imperilled and enfeebled."

"Which is as much as to say that everybody is conspiring against it," cried Henri.

"It resembles," continued Quélus, "those strange gods, who, like the gods of Tiberius and Caligula, sank into old age, but could not die, and in their immortality continued to follow the pathways of human infirmities. When these gods reached the point of utter decrepitude, they could be arrested in their progress only by the beautiful devotion of some worshipper, whose self-sacrifice rejuvenated and renewed them. Then, regenerated by the transfusion of young and generous blood, they lived again, again became strong and powerful. Well, sire, your royalty resembles these gods: it can live only by sacrifices."

"His words are golden," said Chicot. "Quélus, my son, go and preach in the streets of Paris, and I 'll bet an ox against an egg that you 'll extinguish Lincestre, Cahier, Cotton, and even that thunderbolt of eloquence called Gorenflot."

Henri did not answer; it was evident that a great change was at work in his mind. He had at first showered scornful looks on the minions; now that an idea of the truth was getting hold of him, he became pensive, gloomy, anxious.

"Go on," said he, "you see I am listening, Quélus."

"Sire," he resumed, "you are a very great King, but you have no longer any horizon before your eyes. The nobility have erected barriers beyond which you see nothing, except, perchance, the barriers the people have raised, which are already beginning to tower above them. Well, sire, — you are a valiant soldier, and can tell us what happens in battle when one battalion is placed, like a menacing wall, within thirty yards of another battalion? Cowards look behind them, and, seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then, be it so; forward!" cried the King. "God's death! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were ever finer battles seen, I ask you, than those in which I was engaged in my youth? Has the century whose end we are nearing ever resounded with names more glorious than those of Jarnac and Monconcour? Forward, gentlemen, and, as was my custom, I will be the first to dash into the thick of the battle!"

"Yes, yes, sire," shouted the young men, electrified by the warlike declaration of the King, "forward!"

Chicot sat up.

"Peace, there, you fellows," said he; "let my orator continue. Go on, Quélus, my son, go on; you have said some good and fine things already, and you must say some more; continue, my friend, continue."

"Yes, Chicot, and you are right, too, as you often are. Yes, I will continue and say to his Majesty that the moment has arrived for royalty to accept one of those sacrifices of which I spoke just now. Against all these ramparts, which are insensibly closing in around your Majesty, four men are about to march, sure of being encouraged by you, sire, and of being glorified by posterity."

"What do you say, Quélus?" asked the King, his eyes gleaming with a joy that was tempered with anxiety; "who are these four men?"

"I and these gentlemen, sire," said the young man, with that sentiment of pride which ennobles every man who stakes his life on a great principle or on a great passion, "devote ourselves."

"For what?"

"For your safety."

"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men," cried Henri.

"Oh, sire, that is but the expression of vulgar prejudice, as well as of your Majesty's generous concern for our safety, which you try in vain to hide beneath this transparent veil, for we recognize it; speak like a King, sire, and not like some tradesman of the Rue Saint-Denis. Do not feign to believe that Maugiron detests Antraguet, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Épernon is jealous of Bussy, or that Quélus is embittered against Ribeirac. Oh, no! They are all young, genial, and debonair; all, friends and enemies, might easily come to love one another. It is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man that places the swords in our hands. It is the quarrel of France with Anjou; it is the quarrel of popular right with right divine; we are marching as champions of royalty into the lists where the champions of the League stand ready to encounter us, and we come to say: 'Bless us, my sovereign liege, smile on those about to die for you. With your blessing we may, perhaps, return victors; with your smile death will not be unwelcome."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quélus and the others. He clasped them to his heart, and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to the tenderest emotions and sanctified by real devotion.

Chicot, grave and melancholy, his hand pressed to his forehead, looked on from the back of the alcove, and his face, ordinarily cold and indifferent, or cynical and sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah! my heroes," said the King, after a pause, "your self-devotion is sublime, and the task you undertake a glorious one, and I am proud to-day, not of reigning over France, but of being your friend. Still, as I know my own interests better than anybody, I cannot accept a sacrifice, whose results, however magnificent they may seem to you now, would be to deliver me, if you failed, into the hands of my enemies. Believe me, the power of France suffices for a war with Anjou; I know my brother, the Guises, and the League; often during my life have I tamed horses that were more fiery and refractory."

"But, sire," said Maugiron, "soldiers do not reason thus; they cannot admit the consideration of possible bad luck into the

examination of a question of this kind, which is a question of honor, a question of sentiment, in which a man acts by conviction rather than by reason."

"Pardon me, Maugiron," answered the King; "a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Then, sire, do you reflect, and let us, who are only soldiers, act," said Schomberg. "Besides, I am unacquainted with ill-luck; I have always been fortunate" —

"Ah! my friend!" interrupted the King, sadly, "I cannot say as much; but then, you are hardly twenty."

"Sire," said Quélus, "your Majesty's gracious words but redouble our ardor. On what day shall we cross swords with MM. de Bussy, Livarot, Antraguet, and Ribeirac?"

"Never. I forbid it absolutely; never; do you hear me?"

"Deign to excuse us, sire," answered Quélus; "but the appointment was made yesterday before dinner, the word has been spoken and we cannot withdraw it."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri; "the King absolves from all oaths and promises by simply saying: 'I will or I will not;' for the King is omnipotence itself. Tell these gentlemen I have threatened you with my anger if you fight, and, that you yourselves may not doubt that such is the case, I swear to banish you if" —

"Stop, sire," said Quélus, "for, if you can absolve us in relation to our words, God alone can absolve you in relation to yours. Swear not, then, sire, because, if for such a reason we have deserved your anger, and if the issue of that anger should be our banishment, we will go into exile joyfully; for, when we are no longer within your Majesty's territories, we can then keep our word and meet our adversaries in a foreign country."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range even of an arquebuse," cried Henri, "I will have the whole four of them thrown into the Bastile."

"Sire," said Quélus, "upon whatever day your Majesty should act thus, we would go barefooted and with ropes about our necks to Maître Laurent Testu, the governor, and beg him to imprison us along with these gentlemen."

"God's death! I will have their heads cut off; I am the King, I presume."

"If our enemies met with such a fate, sire, we would cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his dark eyes:

"Well and good!" said he, "if God did not bless a cause defended by such brave and noble persons as I see before me" —

"Be not impious — do not blaspheme!" said Chicot, solemnly, arising from his couch and addressing the King. "Yes, these are noble hearts. Great heavens! do as they wish; do you hear me, my master; come, fix a day for these young gentlemen; that is your business now, and not to dictate to God his duty."

"O God! O God!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we beseech you," said the four gentlemen, with bowed heads and bended knees.

"Well, be it so! God is just, he must grant us the victory. But let us prepare for our task in a Christian and judicious manner. Dear friends, remember that Jarnac punctually performed his devotions before fighting with La Chateigneraie: the latter was a first-rate swordsman; but he forget his religion in feasting and revelry, visited women, — an abominable sin! In short, he tempted God, who would, perhaps, have smiled on his youth, beauty, and vigor, and saved his life; and yet he was hamstrung by Jarnac. Listen; we will engage in certain devotional exercises. If I had time I would send your swords to Rome to be blessed by the Holy Father — But we have the shrine of Sainte Geneviève, the relics in which are equal to the best. Let us fast and punish our bodies, and, above all, let us sanctify the great festival of Corpus Christi; then, on the day after" —

"Ah, sire, thanks! thanks!" cried the four young gentlemen; "it will be in a week, then."

And they seized the hands of the King, who embraced them all once more; then he entered his oratory, weeping bitterly.

"Our cartel is drawn up," said Quélus; "we have but to add the day and the hour to it. Write, Maugiron, on this table with the King's pen; write: 'The day after Corpus Christi.'"

"It is done," answered Maugiron; "who is the herald that is to carry the letter?"

"I, if you have no objection," said Chicot, coming up to them; "only, I want to give you an advice, my children. His Majesty talks of fasting, punishing the body, etc. Nothing could be better, if you should make a vow to do so after the

victory. But before the combat, I should, I fancy, have more reliance on the efficaciousness of good food, generous wine, and a good eight hours' sleep, taken either by day or by night. Nothing gives such suppleness and strength to the wrist as three hours spent at table, provided, of course, that there is no intoxication. I approve all the King says on the subject of love; it is too soul-subduing, and you want all your courage; you will do well to wean yourselves from it."

"Bravo, Chicot," chorused all the young men.

"Adieu, my young lions," answered the Gascon, "I am going to the Hôtel de Bussy."

He went three steps and then turned back.

"By the way," said he, "do not leave the King's side during our fine festival of Corpus Christi; and let not a single one of you go into the country; stay in the Louvre like a little cluster of paladins. You agree, don't you? — eh? yes. Then I'll do your commission."

And Chicot, with the letter in his hand, opened his long legs as if they were a pair of compasses and disappeared.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

CORPUS CHRISTI.

During this week events were gathering as a tempest gathers in the depths of the heavens during the calm and heavy days of summer.

After an attack of fever that lasted twenty-four hours, Monsoreau rallied and devoted all his energies to the task of watching for the spoiler of his honor; but as he made no discovery, he became more convinced than ever of the Duc d'Anjou's hypocrisy and of his evil designs on Diane.

During the day Bussy kept up his visits to the house of the grand hunter.

Warned, however, by Rémy that his patient was constantly on the watch, he gave up entering at night through the window.

Chicot divided his time into two parts.

The one was devoted to his beloved master, Henri de Valois, whom he quitted as little as possible and guarded as carefully as a mother does her babe.

The other was for his affectionate friend Gorenflot, whom he had, with great difficulty, persuaded to return to his cell a week before, he himself acting as his guide and receiving the most courteous reception from the abbot, Messire Joseph Foulon.

At this first interview much had been spoken of the King's piety, and the prior seemed in ecstasies of gratitude when he learned of the honor the King was about to do the abbey by visiting it.

The honor was enhanced by the fact that, in compliance with the request of the venerable abbot, Henri was said to have consented to spend the day and the night in retreat in the convent.

Chicot assured the abbot that the expectation, which he hardly ventured to entertain, would be realized, and, as it was known that Chicot had the King's ear, he was invited to return, which Chicot promised to do.

As for Gorenflot, he grew six cubits taller in the estimation of the monks.

And it was really one of Gorenflot's master-strokes to have been so successful in securing Chicot's entire confidence; why, the wily Machiavelli could not have done better!

Being invited to return, Chicot returned, and as he brought with him, stowed away under his cloak or in his pockets or wide boots, flasks of wine of the rarest and most perfect vintage, he received a warmer welcome from Brother Gorenflot than even from Messire Joseph Foulon.

Then he would shut himself up in the monk's cell for entire hours, sharing, according to general rumor, his studies and his ecstasies.

The eve of Corpus Christi, he spent even the whole night in the convent; the next day it was whispered through the cloisters that Gorenflot had persuaded Chicot to take the robe.

As for the King, he passed the time in giving excellent fencing-lessons to his friends, especially to D'Épernon, to whom fate had allotted so dangerous an adversary, and who was visibly alarmed by the near approach of the decisive day.

Any one who happened to be rambling through the city at certain hours during the night would have encountered in the Quartier Sainte-Geneviève the singular-looking monks of whom our readers have had some description in the earlier chapters,

and who bore a much closer resemblance to reiters than to friars.

Finally, to complete our picture, we might add that the Hôtel de Guise had become the most mysterious, noisy, and populous caravansary interiorly and the most deserted exteriorly that can well be imagined; that clandestine meetings were held every night in the grand hall, after the blinds and windows had been hermetically closed; that these meetings were preceded by dinners to which none but men were invited, and yet they were presided over by Madame de Montpensier.

We are forced to supply our readers with these details, gathered from the memoires of the period, because they would never find them among the archives of the police.

In fact, the police of this beneficent reign had not even a suspicion of the plot that was being hatched under its very nose, although this plot, as we shall see afterward, was to have important consequences; and as for the worthy citizens who made their nightly rounds, sallet on head and halberd in hand, they had no suspicion, either, being a sort of folk incapable of scenting out any peril except that which arose from fire, thieves, mad dogs, and quarrelsome tipplers.

Now and then a patrol would halt in front of the Belle-Étoile, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec. But Maître la Hurière was known to be such a zealous Catholic that the great noise heard in his hostelry was assumed to be created by persons wishful of extending the glory of God.

Such was the condition of affairs in the city of Paris when the morning of the great solemnity called Corpus Christi arrived, a solemnity that has been abolished by our constitutional government.

It was a beautiful morning; the weather was superb, and the flowers, strewed along the streets, sent their perfumes through the air.

On this morning Chicot, who for the last fortnight had slept every night in the King's room, awoke Henri early; nobody as yet had entered the King's bedchamber.

"A plague on you, my poor Chicot!" cried Henri; "you always select the most unseasonable moment. You have broken in upon the most delightful dream I ever had in my life."

"And what was your dream, my son?" asked Chicot.

"I dreamed that Quélus had run Antraguet through the

body with a segoon, and that he was swimming in the blood of his enemy. But it is daylight, my friend. Let us go and pray that my dream may be realized. Call, Chicot, call!"

"Why, what do you want?"

"My hair-shirt and scourges."

"Would n't a good breakfast be better?" inquired Chicot.

"Pagan!" cried Henri; "who would hear Mass on Corpus Christi with a full stomach?"

"You 're right."

"Call, Chicot, call."

"Patience," said Chicot, "it 's not yet eight, and you have the whole day to wallop yourself in. Let us have a little chat first; won't you chat with your friend, Valois? Chicot pledges you his word that you will not repent of it."

"Talk away," said Henri, "but do it quick."

"How shall we divide our day, my son?"

"Into three parts."

"In honor of the Blessed Trinity, I see, very good. And now for these three parts."

"First, mass at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Good."

"Return to the Louvre for collation."

"Very good!"

"Then processions of penitents through the streets, stopping to make stations in the chief convents of Paris, beginning with the Jacobins and ending with Sainte Geneviève, where I have promised the prior to go on a retreat until to-morrow in the cell of a sort of saint who will spend the night praying for the success of our arms."

"I know him."

"The saint?"

"Perfectly."

"So much the better; you shall accompany me, Chicot; we will pray together."

"Yes, you may rest easy in your mind about that."

"Then, dress yourself and come."

"Wait a moment."

"What for?"

"I have a few more questions to put to you."

"Can't you put them while my people are making my toilet?"

"I prefer putting them while we are alone."

"Then do so speedily, the time is passing."

"What about the court?"

"It will follow me."

"And your brother?"

"Accompanies me."

"And your guards?"

"The French guards will wait for me at the Louvre with Crillon; the Swiss at the gate of the abbey."

"Capital!" said Chicot. "I have now all the information I want."

"I may call, then?"

"Yes, call away."

Henri struck a bell.

"The ceremony will be magnificent," continued Chicot.

"God will be pleased with us, I hope."

"We'll know that to-morrow. But say, Henri, before anybody enter, have you nothing else to tell me."

"No. Have I omitted any of the details of the ceremonial?"

"It is not of that I am speaking."

"Then of what are you speaking?"

"Of nothing."

"But you ask me" —

"If it is quite settled that you are to go to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève?"

"Decidedly."

"And that you are to pass the night there?"

"I promised to do so."

"Well, if you have nothing to say to me, my son, I have something to say to you, and it is that this programme does not suit me at all."

"Does n't suit you?"

"No, and when we have dined" —

"When we have dined?"

"I will tell you of another arrangement I have figured out."

"Well, I consent to it."

"Even if you did n't consent, my son, it would still be all the same."

"What do you mean?"

"Hush! your valets are in the antechamber."

No sooner were these words out of Chicot's mouth than the usher opened the portières, and the barber, perfumer, and a *valet de chambre* entered. They took entire possession of the

King and performed on his august person one of those operations which we have already described in the beginning of this work.

When the toilet was about two-thirds finished, his highness the Duc d'Anjou was announced.

Henri turned round and called up his best smiles to receive him.

The duke was accompanied by M. de Monsoreau, D'Épernon, and Aurilly.

D'Épernon and Aurilly stood behind him.

At the sight of the count, still pale and looking more frightful than ever, Henri gave a start of surprise.

The duke noticed the movement, which did not escape the count, either.

"Sire," said the duke, "M. de Monsoreau has come to pay homage to your Majesty."

"Thanks, monsieur," said Henri, "and I am the more touched by your visit because you have been wounded, have you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"While out hunting, was it not?"

"While out hunting, sire."

"But you are better now, I hope?"

"I am entirely recovered."

"Sire," said the Duc d'Anjou, "would it not please you to have M. de Monsoreau get up a hunt for us in the woods of Compiègne, after our devotions are finished?"

"But," said Henri, "are you not aware that to-morrow" —

He was about to say "four of your friends are about to fight four of mine;" but he remembered that the secret must have been kept, and he paused.

"I am not aware of anything, sire," returned the Duc d'Anjou, "and if your Majesty will inform me" —

"I meant," answered Henri, "that as I am to spend to-night in prayer at the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, I could not be ready, perhaps, to-morrow. But M. le Comte may set out, notwithstanding. If the hunt do not take place to-morrow, we can have it the day after."

"You understand?" said the duke to Monsoreau, who bowed.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied the count.

At this moment Schomberg and Quélus entered. The King received them with open arms.

"Another day," said Quélus, saluting the King.

"And more than a day, fortunately," said Schomberg.

During this time Monsoreau was saying to the Duc d'Anjou:

"You are having me exiled, monseigneur."

"Is it not the grand huntsman's duty to arrange the King's hunts?" answered François, with a laugh.

"I understand," replied Monsoreau, "and I see clearly how matters stand. The week's delay which your highness asked of me expires this evening, and your highness prefers to send me to Compiègne rather than keep your promise. But let your highness beware. Before night I can with a single word" —

François seized the count by the wrist.

"Silence," said he; "I will keep this promise whose fulfilment you claim."

"Explain yourself."

"Your departure will be publicly known, since the order is official."

"Well?"

"Well, you will not go, but you will hide in the neighborhood of your house; then, believing you away, the man you wished to discover will come. The rest concerns yourself; for this is all I promised, if I am not mistaken."

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsoreau, "if this be so" —

"You have my word for it," said the duke.

"I have better than that, monseigneur; I have your signature," said Monsoreau.

"Oh, yes, *mordieu!* I know that well."

And the duke left Monsoreau, and went up to his brother. Aurilly touched D'Épernon's arm.

"It is all up," said he.

"What is all up?" asked D'Épernon.

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow?"

"You may take my word for it."

"And who will prevent him?"

"What matter, so long as he does n't fight."

"If that be so, there are a thousand crowns at your service, my dear sorcerer."

"Gentlemen," said the King, who had finished his toilet, "now for Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois."

"And from there to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève?" asked the duke.

"Certainly," answered the King.

"You may stake your life on it," said Chicot, buckling on his belt.

And Henri passed into the gallery, where his whole court were waiting for him.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

WHICH WILL MAKE THE PRECEDING CHAPTER CLEARER.

On the previous evening, when the Guises and the Angevines had agreed upon their plans, and formed all their arrangements for carrying them out, M. de Monsoreau had returned to his house, where he found Bussy.

Then, fearing that this brave gentlemen, for whom he still entertained the warmest friendship, might be sadly compromised the next day, as he knew nothing of what was likely to occur, he took him aside.

"My dear count," he had said, "would you permit me to give you a bit of advice?"

"Why not? You will confer a favor on me by doing so," had been Bussy's answer.

"If I were in your place, I think I should go away from Paris to-morrow."

"I! And for what reason, pray?"

"All I can tell you is that your absence would, in all probability, save you from great trouble."

"From great trouble?" asked Bussy, looking into the count's eyes with a searching gaze. "And what is the trouble?"

"Are you ignorant of what is to occur to-morrow?"

"Completely."

"Upon your honor?"

"Upon my honor as a gentleman."

"And M. d'Anjou has said nothing to you?"

"Nothing. M. d'Anjou trusts me only with matters which he tells everybody, and I will add, with matters anybody can find out for himself."

"Well, I who am not the Duc d'Anjou and who love my friends for their own sakes and not for mine, I will tell you that there

are plans in preparation which may lead to grave issues to-morrow, and that the parties of Anjou and Guise are contemplating a stroke which may result in the King's abdication."

Bussy stared at M. de Monsoreau distrustfully, but it was impossible to make any mistake as to the perfect frankness which marked the expression of his face.

"Count," he answered, "I belong to the Duc d'Anjou, as you know, "that is to say, my life and sword belong to him. The King, whom I have never really attempted to injure, is set against me, and never misses an opportunity of saying or doing something to hurt me. And to-morrow, even," continued Bussy, lowering his voice, — "I tell this to you, but to you alone, you understand? — to-morrow I am about to risk my life to humble Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

"So," inquired Monsoreau, "you are resolved to stand the hazard of your attachment to the Duc d'Anjou, with all its consequences?"

"Yes."

"You know where all this will lead you, I suppose?"

"I know where I am determined to stop; whatever reason I may have to complain of the King, I will never raise a hand against the Lord's anointed; but I will let others act as they like, and, while never challenging or attacking any one, I will follow M. d'Anjou and defend him if he be exposed to danger."

M. de Monsoreau reflected a moment, and, placing his hand on Bussy's shoulder:

"My dear count," said he, "the Duc d'Anjou is a miscreant, a coward, and a traitor, a man capable of sacrificing his most faithful friend, his most devoted servant, to his jealousy or to his fears. Dear count, abandon him, take a friend's advice; go and spend the day at your little house in Vincennes, go wherever you like, but do not go to the procession on Corpus Christi."

Bussy looked at him keenly.

"Then why do you follow the Duc d'Anjou yourself?" asked he.

"Because, in connection with certain matters that concern my honor, I have need of him still, at least, for a time," answered the count.

"Well, you are like me," said Bussy; "I follow the duke on account of matters that concern my honor also."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed Bussy's hand, and they parted.

We have told, in the foregoing chapter, what occurred on the next day at the King's levée.

Monsoreau returned home and informed his wife of his departure for Compiègne, at the same time giving orders to have everything in readiness for this departure.

Diane heard the news with joy.

She learned from her husband of the duel between Bussy and D'Épernon, but, as D'Épernon had less reputation for courage and skill than the other minions, there was more pride than fear in her emotions with regard to the next day's combat.

Bussy had gone in the morning to the Hôtel d'Anjou and accompanied the duke to the Louvre, remaining himself, however, in the gallery.

When the prince left his brother he took him along with him, and the whole royal procession moved toward Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.

Seeing Bussy so frank, loyal, and devoted, the prince felt some passing remorse; but there were two things that banished this sentiment from his heart: one of them was the very influence Bussy had acquired over him, the sort of influence a vigorous mind must always acquire over a weak mind, — he feared that if Bussy stood near his throne when he was king, Bussy would be the real sovereign; the other was Bussy's love for Madame de Monsoreau, a love that aroused all the pangs of jealousy in the very depths of the prince's soul.

However, as Monsoreau inspired him with almost as much uneasiness as Bussy, he had said to himself:

"Either Bussy will accompany me, sustain me by his valor, and secure the triumph of my cause, — and when I am triumphant, what Monsoreau says or does matters little, — or Bussy will forsake me, and then I owe him nothing, and will forsake him in my turn."

The result of this double reflection, of which Bussy was the subject, was that the prince never took his eyes off the young man for a moment.

He saw him enter the church, serene and smiling, after courteously making way for his antagonist, M. d'Épernon, and then kneel a little in rear.

The prince beckoned to Bussy to come to him. In the position he occupied, he was obliged to turn his head round

entirely; with his gentleman beside him on the left, he had only to turn his eyes.

About a quarter of an hour after mass had begun, Rémy entered the church and knelt beside his master. The duke started at the appearance of the young doctor, whom he knew to be a sharer of all Bussy's secrets.

In a moment or so, after a few words interchanged in an undertone, Rémy passed a note to the count.

The prince felt a thrill in every vein: the superscription was in a delicate, beautiful handwriting.

"From her!" said he; "she is telling him that her husband is leaving Paris."

Bussy slipped the note into the bottom of his hat, opened and read it.

The prince no longer saw the note, but he saw Bussy's face, radiant with love and joy.

"Ah! woe to you if you do not accompany me!" he murmured.

Bussy raised the note to his lips, and then placed it inside his doublet, next his heart.

The duke looked round. If Monsoreau had been there, he would not have had the patience, perhaps, to wait till evening to denounce Bussy to him.

As soon as mass was over, the procession returned to the Louvre, where a collation was ready for the King in his apartments, and another for the gentlemen in the gallery.

The Swiss formed a line from the gate of the Louvre to the palace.

Crillon and the French guards were drawn up in the courtyard.

Chicot was watching the King as intently as the Duc d'Anjou was watching Bussy.

After entering the Louvre the latter approached the duke.

"Excuse me, monseigneur," he said, bowing; "might I say a few words to your highness?"

"Are you in a hurry?" asked the duke.

"In a great hurry, monseigneur."

"Could you not say them during the procession? We shall walk side by side."

"Your highness will pardon me; but the reason why I stopped your highness was to request you not to ask me to accompany you."

"Why so?" inquired the duke, in a voice the change in which he could not utterly conceal.

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is to be a very important day, as your highness is well aware, since it is to decide the quarrel between Anjou and France; I wish to retire to my little house at Vincennes, and spend the entire day in seclusion."

"And so you will not join the procession, although the King and his whole court form a part of it?"

"No, monseigneur; always, of course, with the permission of your highness."

"And so you will not return to my side even at Sainte Geneviève?"

"Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself."

"But if it should happen during the day that I should have special need of my friends" —

"As your highness could only need me for the purpose of drawing my sword against your King, I must, for a still stronger reason, ask your highness to grant my request; my sword is pledged to meet only M. d'Épernon."

Monsoreau had told the prince the evening before that he might rely on Bussy. Everything had changed since then, and the change came wholly from the note brought to the church by Le Haudouin.

"So," said the duke, from between his closed teeth, "you desert your lord and master, Bussy?"

"Monseigneur," answered Bussy, "the man who is to stake his life to-morrow in a furious, bloody, and deadly duel, as, I answer for it, ours is sure to be, has but one master, and to that master shall my last devotions be paid."

"You know I am playing for a throne and you forsake me."

"Monseigneur, I have worked pretty well for you; I will work for you again to-morrow. Do not ask me for more than my life."

"'T is well!" replied the duke, in a hollow voice; "you are free; go, M. de Bussy."

Bussy, undisturbed by the prince's sudden coldness, saluted, went down the staircase of the Louvre, and, once outside, made his way home with as much speed as possible.

The duke summoned Aurilly.

Aurilly appeared.

"Well, monseigneur?" inquired the lute-player.

"Well, he has condemned himself!"

"He will not follow you?"

"No."

"He goes to keep the appointment made in the note?"

"Yes."

"Then it is for this evening?"

"For this evening."

"Has M. de Monsoreau been warned?"

"As to the rendezvous, yes; as to the man he will find at the rendezvous, not yet."

"You are determined to sacrifice the count?"

"I am determined to have revenge," said the prince. "I have but one fear now."

"What is it?"

"That Monsoreau may trust to his strength and address and that Bussy may escape him."

"Monseigneur, you need not be alarmed, as far as that's concerned."

"How so?"

"Have you condemned M. de Bussy irrevocably?"

"Yes, *mordieu!* — a man who treats me like a schoolboy; who deprives me of my will and puts his own in place of it; who takes my mistress from me and makes her his; a sort of lion of whom I am not so much the master as I am the keeper. Yes, yes, Aurilly, he is condemned, without appeal and without mercy."

"Well, as I said before, your highness need not be uneasy; if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape from another."

"And who is this other?"

"Does monseigneur order me to name him?"

"Yes, I order you."

"It is M. d'Épernon."

"D'Épernon, who is to fight with him to-morrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Tell me all about the matter."

Aurilly was about to give the information asked for, when the duke was called away. The King was at table and was surprised at the absence of the Duc d'Anjou, or rather, Chicot had brought his absence to Henri's notice, and the latter had sent for his brother.

"You can tell me more during the procession," said the duke.

And he followed the usher who had come for him.

As we shall not have leisure to accompany the duke and Aurilly through the streets of Paris, our attention being claimed by a greater personage than either of them, we had better tell our readers what had passed between D'Épernon and the lute-player.

In the morning, about daybreak, D'Épernon had gone to the Hôtel d'Anjou and inquired for Aurilly.

The two gentlemen had been long acquainted.

The musician had taught the royal favorite to play on the lute, and pupil and teacher had often met to scrape the violoncello or thrum the viol, as was the fashion at the time, not only in Spain, but in France.

The result was that a rather tender friendship, tempered by etiquette, existed between them.

Moreover, the wily Gascon was a diplomatist to the tips of his fingers, and considered there was no better way of reaching the masters than through their servants; so there were very few of the Duc d'Anjou's secrets of which D'Épernon was not cognizant through Aurilly.

Owing to this Machiavellian policy, he managed to keep on the side both of the King and of the prince, so that should the latter ascend the throne, he was pretty sure of not having an enemy in his future sovereign.

His object in visiting Aurilly was to discuss the approaching duel with Bussy.

This duel was a source of constant anxiety to him.

At any period of his life, bravery had never been one of his shining characteristics; now, to meet Bussy coolly in single combat would require more than bravery, it would require utter recklessness; to fight with him was to encounter almost certain death.

Those who had essayed the experiment had measured their length on the ground, from which they had never arisen.

At the first word spoken by D'Épernon on the subject he had so much at heart, the musician, who was well aware of his master's secret hatred for Bussy, expressed the utmost sympathy for his pupil, told him, with affectionate concern, that for the last week Bussy had practised fencing two hours every morning with a trumpeter of the guards, the most dangerous swordsman ever known in Paris, a sort of artist in cutting and thrusting, a traveller and philosopher also, who had borrowed from the Italians their cautious play, from the Spaniards their

brilliant and subtle feints, from the Germans the firmness of the wrist and their method of parrying and lunging, and, finally, from the savage Poles, then known as Sarmatians, their springs and bounds, their sudden prostrations, and their close embrace, body to body. During this long enumeration of the chances against him D'Épernon in his terror actually gnawed off all the carmine that glazed his finger-nails.

"Why, I'm a dead man!" said he, half laughing, but turning pale.

"I'm afraid it looks that way," answered Aurilly.

"But it is absurd!" cried D'Épernon; "to go out with a man who is sure to kill you! It's the same as playing dice with a man who is safe to throw up the double six every time!"

"You ought to have thought of that before making your engagement, M. le Duc."

"Hang it," said D'Épernon, "I'll not keep it. I was n't born in Gascony for nothing. Give up the ghost of your own free will, and you just twenty-five! — not such an idiot. But, now I think of it — yes, that's logical; listen" —

"I'm all attention."

"M. de Bussy is sure to kill me, you say?"

"I don't doubt about it for a moment."

"Then, if that be the case, it is n't a duel; it is an assassination."

"My opinion, exactly."

"And if it is an assassination" —

"Well?"

"It is lawful to anticipate an assassination by" —

"By?"

"By — a murder."

"Undoubtedly."

"Since he wants to kill me, what the devil hinders me from killing him first?"

"Great heavens! nothing at all. The very thing I was thinking of myself."

"Is not my reasoning logical, then?"

"As clear as day."

"And natural?"

"Nothing could be more so."

"But, instead of cruelly killing him with my own hands, as he would kill me, well, I have a horror of blood, and so I'll leave the job to some one else."

"Which means you will hire bravoes?"

"By my faith, yes; just as M. de Guise and M. de Mayenne did for Saint-Mégrin."

"It will cost you dear."

"I'll spend three thousand crowns on it."

"But when your bravoes learn the name of the man they're to settle,— you can't get more than six of them for three thousand crowns."

"And is not that enough?"

"Six enough! Why, M. de Bussy would do up four of the six with a mere wave of his hand. Remember the skirmish in the Rue Saint-Antoine, when he wounded Schomberg in the thigh, and you in the arm, and almost gave Quélus his quietus!"

"I'll spend six thousand, if necessary," said D'Épernon. "*Mordieu!* if the thing is to be done at all, it must be well done, so well done that he'll have no chance of escaping."

"You have your men?"

"Oh," replied D'Épernon, "I know plenty of fellows who have nothing to do, disbanded soldiers here and there, plucky rascals who are quite as good as the bravoes in Florence and Venice."

"Capital, but be cautious."

"Why?"

"If they fail, they'll denounce you."

"But the King is on my side."

"It's something, but the King can't hinder M. de Bussy from killing you."

"True, perfectly true," said D'Épernon, thoughtfully.

"I think I could point out an arrangement that would make things safe."

"Tell it to me, my good friend."

"Would you have any objection to making common cause with another enemy of Bussy's?"

"I should object to nothing that would double my chances and enable me to get rid of that mad dog."

"Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous."

"Ah! ah!"

"So that, at this very hour" —

"Well, at this very hour — can't you finish?"

"He is laying a snare for him."

"Go on."

"But he lacks money. With six thousand crowns he could

easily manage to settle your business as well as his own. You are not anxious, I presume, to enjoy the credit of this bold stroke ?"

"Good God, no ! all I want is to be left in the background."

"Then have your men sent to the rendezvous, without letting them know you sent them, and he will turn them to account."

"But, though my men may not know me, I should certainly know this man."

"I will point him out to you this very morning."

"Where ?"

"In the Louvre."

"So he is a gentleman ?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall have the six thousand crowns immediately, Aurilly."

"So the matter is settled ?"

"Irrevocably."

"To the Louvre, then !"

"To the Louvre."

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Aurilly said to D'Épernon :

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE PROCESSION.

When the collation was finished, the King entered his room with Chicot, and, soon afterward, made his appearance in penitential garb, with bare feet, a cord around his waist, and a hood which was pulled down over his face.

During his absence the courtiers had made the same toilet.

The weather was magnificent, the pavements were strewn with flowers, and the splendor of the *reposoirs* was reported to be beyond description, especially that of the *reposoir* erected by the monks of Sainte Geneviève in the crypt of their chapel.

Immense crowds of people lined the way which led to the four stations that were to be made by the King at the Jacobins Carmelites, Capuchins, and Genevievans.

The clergy of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois headed the procession. The archbishop of Paris bore the blessed sacrament. Between the clergy and the archbishop young boys and girls walked backward, the former swinging censers, the latter scattering roses.

Then came the King with bare feet, as we have said, and followed by his four friends, barefooted also and robed in the same fashion.

The Duc d'Anjou was next, but in his ordinary costume; all his Angevine courtiers accompanied him, mingled with the great dignitaries of the crown, who marched behind the prince, each in the order assigned him by etiquette.

Then came the citizens and the populace.

It was already past one o'clock when they quitted the Louvre.

Crillon and the French guards wished to follow the King, but the latter signified by a gesture that it was not necessary, and so Crillon and his guards stayed behind to protect the palace.

It was not until nearly six in the evening that, after having made the stations at the different *reposoirs*, the head of the procession got a glimpse of the delicately carved porch of the ancient abbey and of the Genevievans, who, with their prior at their head, were drawn up on the three steps that formed the threshold to receive his Majesty.

Between the abbey and the last station, which had been made at the convent of the Capuchins, the Duc d'Anjou, who had been on his feet since morning, had discovered that he was utterly exhausted; he had, therefore requested the King to allow him to retire to his hôtel; the King at once gave the required permission.

His gentlemen had immediately separated from the procession and followed him, as if to proclaim aloud that they belonged to the duke and not to the King.

But their real reason was that, as three among them should have to fight the next day, they did not think it desirable to overtask the strength of these champions.

At the abbey gate, the King, apparently believing that Quélus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Épernon were in as much need of rest as Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguet, dismissed them also.

The archbishop, who had been officiating since morning, and

who, as well as the other priests, had not broken his fast during the day, was sinking from fatigue; the King took pity on the holy martyrs and allowed them to depart.

Then turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon:

"Holy father," said he, in his most nasal tones, "I have come to seek repose in your secluded retreat, sinner though I am."

The prior inclined.

Then addressing those who, notwithstanding the discomforts of the journey, had followed him even to the end.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said he; "go in peace."

Each saluted respectfully, and the royal penitent, beating his breast, slowly mounted the steps of the abbey.

He had scarcely passed the threshold when the gate was closed behind him.

So absorbed was the King in his devotions that, apparently, he did not notice this circumstance, in which, after all, there was nothing extraordinary, as he had dismissed his entire suite.

"We will first conduct your Majesty to the crypt," said the prior to the King, "which we have done our best to adorn in honor of the King of heaven and earth."

Henri merely made a gesture of assent and walked behind the prior.

But as soon as he had passed through the gloomy arcade, lined on each side by two rows of monks as still as statues, as soon as he was seen to turn the corner that led to the chapel, twenty hoods were thrown back, and eyes could be discerned in the faint light that were aglow with joy and triumphant pride.

For a certainty, the countenances that were now revealed did not belong to idle, timid monks; the thick mustaches, the bronzed complexions, were in themselves suggestive of strength and activity.

Most of these faces were furrowed by scars, and close to one face that bore the noblest and most famous scar of all, appeared the exultant and impassioned face of a woman, who was also robed as a monk.

This woman shook a pair of golden scissors that hung by her side and cried:

"Ah, my brothers, we have the Valois at last."

"Upon my word, I share your opinion, sister," answered the Balafré.

"Not yet, not yet," murmured the cardinal.

"Why so?"

"Do you think our citizen militia is numerous enough to withstand Crillon and his guards?"

"We have something better than that," replied the Duc de Mayenne, "and, believe me, there will not be a single musket-shot exchanged."

"Eh?" said the Duchesse de Montpensier; "you 're not serious, I hope? I should enjoy a little skirmish so much!"

"I 'm heartily sorry, sister, but you 'll have to get along without it. When the King is taken, he will cry out; but there will be none to answer his cries. We shall then, by persuasion or force, but without appearing in the matter, get him to sign his abdication. The news of the abdication will run like wildfire through the city, and all, soldiers as well as citizens, will be in our favor."

"The plan is good, and cannot fail now," said the duchess.

"It is somewhat rough, though," observed the Cardinal de Guise, shaking his head.

"The King will refuse to sign the abdication," added the Balafré; "he is brave, and will prefer death."

"Then let him die!" cried Mayenne and the duchess.

"No," answered the Duc de Guise, firmly, "no! I am perfectly willing to succeed a prince who abdicates and who is despised; but I will not sit on the throne of a monarch who has been assassinated and is pitied. Besides, you leave out of your plans the Duc d'Anjou, who, if the King is killed, will claim the crown."

"Let him claim it, *mordieu!*" said Mayenne, "let him claim it. Our brother the cardinal has foreseen this contingency; the Duc d'Anjou shall be included in his brother's act of abdication. He has been intriguing with the Huguenots, and is unworthy to reign."

"With the Huguenots — are you sure of that?"

"Sure of it? Why, the King of Navarre helped him to escape!"

"There is something in that."

"Then another clause in favor of our house must follow the clause of the King's abdication; this clause shall make you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, brother, and from that to the throne is but a step."

"Yes, yes," said the cardinal, "I have arranged all that.

But it is possible that the French guards, to make sure that the abdication is genuine, and, above all, that it is voluntary, may force the gates of the abbey. Crillon is not a person to be trifled with; he is just the sort of man to say to the King: 'Sire, you must save your honor, though it be at the peril of your life.'"

"That is a matter for the consideration of the general," said Mayenne, "and the general has taken his precautions. If we are besieged, we have eighty gentlemen here, and I have distributed arms to a hundred monks. We could hold out for a month against a whole army, putting aside the fact that, if we could not, we can escape with our prisoner through the underground passage."

"I wonder what the Duc d'Anjou is doing at the present moment."

"In the hour of danger he has weakened, as usual. The duke returned to his hôtel, where he is doubtless waiting for the news along with Monsoreau and Bussy."

"By my soul, it is here he ought to have been, and not at his hôtel."

"I think you are mistaken, brother," replied the cardinal; "if we brought the two brothers together, the nobility and the people would suspect there was a plot to entrap the whole family, and we ought to do everything in our power to avoid the appearance of playing the part of usurper. We inherit, that is all. By leaving the Duc d'Anjou his freedom and the queen mother her independence, we gain the good wishes and the admiration of our partisans, and no one will have anything to say against us. If we act differently, we shall have Bussy and a hundred other dangerous swords against us."

"Pshaw! Bussy is to fight against the minions to-morrow."

"I know he is, and he is sure to kill them, too," said the Duc de Guise; "and, when he has done so, he will belong to us. I should like to make him general of the army in Italy, where war must soon break out. A very superior man is the Seigneur de Bussy, and I have the highest esteem for him."

"And to show that I have quite as much esteem for him as you have, brother," said the Duchesse de Montpensier, "I intend marrying him, if I become a widow."

"Marry him, sister!" cried Mayenne.

"Oh," said the duchess, "greater ladies than I am have

done more than that for him, and he was not then the general of an army, either."

"Come, come," said Mayenne, "we have other things to do at present; let us set about doing them!"

"Who is with the King?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"The prior and Brother Gorenflot, I think," said the cardinal. "It is best he should see only familiar faces for a time. Otherwise, he might take alarm at once."

"Yes," said Mayenne; "besides, it will be pleasanter for us to eat the fruits of the conspiracy than to gather them ourselves."

"Is he in his cell yet?" asked Madame de Montpensier, who was impatient to give the King the third crown she had been so long promising him.

"No, not yet; he is going to see first the great *reposoir* in the crypt and to venerate the holy relics."

"And then?"

"Then the prior will address to him a few high-sounding phrases on the vanity of all earthly things; after which, Brother Gorenflot, — you know him, the monk that delivered that magnificent discourse on the evening of the League" —

"Yes; go on."

"Brother Gorenflot will try to obtain by persuasion that which we are reluctant to wrest from his weakness."

"It would be infinitely better if we succeeded in doing so," said the duke, thoughtfully.

"No doubt of our success," Mayenne answered; "Henri is superstitious and weak-minded. I am quite certain he will yield to the fear of hell."

"Well, I am not at all so certain as you are," said the duke, "but our vessels are burned behind us; there is no going back. So if both Gorenflot's and the prior's efforts fail, we must have recourse to the last resort — intimidation."

"And then I shall clip my Valois," cried the duchess, still reverting to her favorite idea.

At this moment the tinkling of a bell sounded under the vaults, which were darkened by the shades of approaching night.

"The King is descending to the crypt," said the Duc de Guise; "call your friends, Mayenne, and let us all become monks again."

And immediately these bold faces and ardent eyes and tale-

telling wounds were buried in the folds of monastic hoods; then thirty or forty monks, led by the three brothers, made their way to the entrance of the crypt.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

CHICOT I.

The King was so entirely absorbed in his pious meditations that it looked as if the schemes of the Guises could be carried to a successful issue with the greatest ease.

He visited the crypt in company with all the monks, kissed the shrine, and repeated the most lugubrious of the psalms, all the time beating his breast with increasing energy.

Then the prior began his exhortation, to which the King listened with the same marks of fervent contrition.

At length, in obedience to a gesture of the Duc de Guise, Joseph Foulon, with a profound salutation, said to Henri:

"Sire, will it please you now to come and lay your earthly crown at the feet of the eternal King?"

"Let us go," said the King, simply.

And, escorted by the whole community, he proceeded toward the cells opening on the corridor on the left, which could be dimly discerned from the crypt.

Henri was apparently deeply affected. He never ceased beating his breast, and the big rosary, which he quickly turned in his hands at the same time, rang on the chaplet of ivory deaths' heads that was suspended from his belt.

At length he reached the cell; on the threshold stood Gorenflot, his face all in a glow and his eyes sparkling like carbuncles.

"Here?" inquired the King.

"Right here," answered the fat monk.

The King might be excused for a little hesitation, because at the end of the corridor he saw a door, or rather a mysterious-looking grating that opened on a steep slope which was plunged in darkness.

Henri entered the cell.

"*Hic portus salutis*," he murmured, in tones of emotion.

"Yes, indeed," answered Foulon, "*this is a harbor of safety.*"

"Leave us now," said Gorenflot with a majestic gesture.

And immediately the door was shut, and the others departed.

The King, noticing a stool at the back of the cell, sat down and placed his hands on his knees.

"Ah! so here you are, then, Herod; here you are, you pagan, you Nebuchadnezzar," said Gorenflot, abruptly, planting his thick hands on his hips.

The King appeared astonished.

"Is it to me you are speaking, brother?" said he.

"Yes, it is to you I am speaking — and to whom do I speak? Do I not speak to a wretch to whom any epithet, however vile, can be applied with perfect truth?"

"My brother," murmured the King.

"Bah! you have no brother here. I have long been thinking out a sermon, and now you shall have it — I divide it into three parts, as every good preacher should do. In the first place, you are a tyrant; in the second, a satyr; and lastly, you are dethroned."

"Dethroned, brother?" violently cried the King, who was invisible in the darkness.

"Neither more nor less. This abbey is not like Poland; no chance of taking yourself off here."

"Then I have been entrapped."

"Learn, O Valois, that a King is but a man, even when he happen to be a man."

"This is violence, brother!"

"To be sure it is; do you imagine we imprisoned you in order to bow and scrape to you?"

"You violate the spirit of your holy religion, brother."

"Is there any holy religion?" cried Gorenflot.

"Oh!" exclaimed the King, "a saint to utter such horrors!"

"So much the worse, I have said them."

"You expose yourself to damnation."

"Is there any damnation?"

"You talk like an unbeliever, brother."

"Stop that, I say; I don't want any of your preaching. Are you ready, Valois?"

"To do what?"

"To resign your crown. I have been asked to invite you to do so; therefore, I invite you."

"But you are committing a mortal sin."

"Oho! am I?" said Gorenflot, with a cynical smile. "Well, I am empowered to grant absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come now, Brother Valois, do you renounce?"

"What?"

"The throne of France."

"Sooner death!"

"Eh? Well, then, you'll die. Hold on! here 's the prior coming back. Decide!"

"I have my guards, my friends; I shall be able to defend myself."

"Possibly; but we intend killing you first."

"Give me, at least, a moment for reflection."

"Not an instant, not a second."

"Your zeal gets the better of you, brother," said the prior. And he made a sign to the King with his hand which meant:

"Sire, your request is granted."

And the prior again closed the door.

Henri fell into a profound revery.

"Very well," said he, after reflecting for about ten minutes, "I accept the sacrifice."

No sooner were the words spoken than there was a knock at the door.

"It is done," said Gorenflot; "he accepts."

The King heard something like a murmur of mingled joy and surprise outside in the corridor.

"Read him the act," said a voice which produced such a startling effect on the King that he looked out through a grating of the door. A roll of parchment passed from the hand of a monk into that of Gorenflot.

Gorenflot read the act to the King with a good deal of difficulty. Henri was very dejected and buried his face in his hands.

"And if I refuse to sign?" he cried, the tears starting from his eyes.

"It will be doubly your ruin," answered the Duc de Guise, in a voice muffled by his cowl. "Consider yourself as dead to the world, and do not force your subjects to shed the blood of him who was once their King."

"I will not be compelled," said Henri.

"It is what I anticipated," whispered the duke to his sister, who had a sinister gleam in her eyes.

"Go, brother," he added, addressing Mayenne, "see that every one is armed and that all preparations are made."

"For what?" asked the King, plaintively.

"For everything," said the prior.

The King grew more despairing than ever.

"*Corbleu!*" cried Gorenflot, "I hated thee, Valois, but now my scorn is stronger than my hate. Sign, sign, or by this hand alone shalt thou perish."

"Have patience, patience," said the King; "let me pray to the Sovereign Master of us all for resignation."

"He would reflect a second time!" cried Gorenflot.

"Give him till midnight," said the cardinal.

"Thanks, charitable Christian," exclaimed the King, in a paroxysm of despair. "May God reward you!"

"His brain has really become enfeebled," murmured the Duc de Guise; "we serve France by dethroning him."

"No matter," said the duchess; "feeble or not feeble, I'll have the pleasure of clipping him."

During this dialogue, Gorenflot, with folded arms, was overwhelming Henri with the most violent insults and reminding him of all the foul sins of his scandalous life.

Suddenly a dull noise was heard outside the convent.

"Silence!" cried the voice of the Duc de Guise.

There was the deepest silence in an instant. Presently it became possible to distinguish blows, struck forcibly and at regular intervals on the resounding gates of the abbey.

Mayenne came running up as fast as his obesity allowed him.

"Brothers," said he, "there is a troop of armed men in front of the portal."

"They have come for him," said the duchess.

"The more reason why he should be made to sign quick," said the cardinal.

"Sign, Valois, sign!" cried Gorenflot, in a voice of thunder.

"You gave me till midnight," said the King, piteously.

"Ah! you are changing your mind, are you? You expect aid" —

"Undoubtedly, I do. I still have a chance."

"To die, if he does not sign at once," answered the shrill, imperious voice of the duchess.

Gorenflot seized the King's wrist and handed him a pen.

The noise outside increased.

"Another troop!" shouted a monk, who came running up the corridor; "it has surrounded the court on the left."

"Sign!" cried Mayenne and the duchess, impatiently.

The King dipped his pen in the ink-bottle.

"The Swiss!" Foulon hurried in to say; "they have seized the cemetery on the right, and the entire abbey is now invested."

"Well, we will defend ourselves," answered Mayenne, resolutely.

"With such a hostage in our hands, we need not surrender at discretion."

"He has signed!" roared Gorenflot, tearing the parchment from the hand of Henri, who, utterly depressed, buried his head in his hood, and his hood in his arms.

"Then you are king," said the cardinal to the duke. "Take the precious document and hide it quickly."

The King, in the extravagance of his grief, overturned the little lamp that alone shed a light on the scene; but the duke already held the parchment.

"What shall we do! what shall we do!" asked a monk whose robe covered a gentleman armed from top to toe. "Crillon is here with the French guards and threatens to break open the doors. Listen."

"In the King's name!" cried the powerful voice of Crillon.

"What nonsense! there is no longer a king," Gorenflot shouted back through a window.

"Who is the ruffian that says so?" answered Crillon.

"I! I! I!" replied Gorenflot from the darkness, in the most arrogant and provoking tone of voice imaginable.

"Some one point out the scoundrel to me, so that I can have half a dozen bullets planted in his belly," said Crillon.

And Gorenflot, seeing the guards level their weapons, dropped down and fell on his back in the middle of the cell.

"Break open the door, M. Crillon," said, amid general silence, a voice that raised the hair on the head of all the monks, real or pretended, that were in the corridor.

The voice came from a man who issued forth from the ranks of the soldiers and marched up to the steps of the main entrance to the abbey.

"Yes, sire," answered Crillon, giving a tremendous blow on the door with an axe.

It shook the very walls.

"What do you want?" said the prior, appearing at a window, and trembling with terror.

"Ah, it is you, M. Foulon," replied the same calm and haughty voice. "I want my jester, who went to spend the night in one of your cells. I am at a loss for Chicot. Without him I feel quite bored in the Louvre."

"And I'm not bored at all, I never had such fun in my life, my son," answered Chicot, getting rid of his hood and pushing through the throng of monks, who recoiled with howls of terror.

At this moment the Duc de Guise had a lamp brought to him and read at the bottom of the act the signature, still fresh, that had been obtained with so much difficulty:

"Chicot I."

"'Chicot I.,'" he cried; "a thousand devils!"

"Well," said the cardinal, "we are ruined; let us fly."

"Ah! bah!" cried Chicot to Gorenflot, who was almost in a swoon, as he lashed him with the cord he had worn round his robe, "ah! bah!"

CHAPTER XC.

PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST.

As the King spoke and the conspirators recognized him, their stupefaction gave place to dismay.

The abdication signed "Chicot I." changed their dismay to fury.

Chicot threw away his frock from his shoulders, crossed his arms, and, while Gorenflot was taking to his heels, sustained the first shock, smiling and impassive.

But he passed through an awful moment.

The gentlemen, quivering with rage, advanced on the Gascon, determined to avenge the cruel mystification of which they had been the victims.

But this man with no other weapons than the two arms that covered his breast, this man with the smiling lips that seemed to defy so much strength to attack so much weakness, had, perhaps, more effect in arresting their progress than even the cardinal, who uttered strong remonstrances, and pointed out

that the death of Chicot would serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the King, his jester's accomplice in the scene of appalling buffoonery.

The result was that daggers and rapiers were lowered before Chicot, who, whether from a spirit of self-sacrifice, and he was capable of it, or from his ability to discern their thoughts, continued to laugh in their faces.

Meanwhile, the King's threats and Crillon's blows became more violent.

It was evident the door could not long resist an attack, which they did not even think of repelling.

So, after a moment's deliberation, the Duc de Guise gave the order to retreat.

This order brought a mocking smile to Chicot's lips.

During the nights he had spent with Gorenflot, he had examined the underground passage, had examined the door at the outlet and brought it to the notice of the King, who had stationed there Tocquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards.

It was, therefore, evident that the Leaguers would be trapped, one after the other.

The cardinal was the first to steal away, followed by fifty gentlemen.

Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number of monks; next followed Mayenne, whose preposterous stomach and general pursiness were obstacles to anything like activity; he was naturally, then, entrusted with the defence of the rear.

When he dragged his lumpish, unwieldly body past Gorenflot's cell, the jester did more than laugh, he held both his sides; he was, literally, convulsed.

Ten minutes slipped by; Chicot listened eagerly, thinking every moment he could hear the noise of the Leaguers being driven back into the tunnel; but, instead of that, the noise made by them, was, to his amazement, gradually dying away.

Suddenly a thought flashed through the Gascon's mind, and instead of roaring with laughter, he gnashed his teeth with rage.

A considerable time had now elapsed and the Leaguers did not return. Had they perceived that the door was guarded, and discovered another outlet?

Chicot was rushing out of his cell, when, all at once, he found the door obstructed by a shapeless mass that rolled at his feet and tore the hair of its head out by fistfuls.

"Ah! wretch that I am!" cried Gorenflot. "Oh! my dear M. Chicot, forgive me! forgive me!"

How was it that the monk, who had been the first to fly, was here alone when he ought to have been so far away?

This was the question that quite reasonably occurred to the mind of Chicot.

"Oh, my good M. Chicot, my dear master, help! help!" Gorenflot howled; "pardon your unworthy friend, who repents and does penance even at your very knees."

"But," inquired Chicot, "how is it you did not manage to escape with the other rascals?"

"Because I could not go where the others went; because the Lord in his anger made me pot-bellied. Oh! miserable paunch! Oh! most luckless of stomachs!" cried Gorenflot, striking with both his clenched hands the article thus apostrophized. "Oh! why am I not slim and genteel like you, M. Chicot! What a beautiful thing, and, oh! above all, what a lucky thing it is to be slim!"

Chicot was absolutely a stranger to the cause of Gorenflot's lamentations.

"Then the others are getting through, somewhere or other? The others are escaping?" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

"Well, of course they are! What would you have them do? Wait to be hanged? Oh, my unfortunate belly!"

"Silence!" cried Chicot, "and answer."

Gorenflot raised himself on his knees.

"Question me, M. Chicot," he said, "you have certainly the right to do so."

"How are the others escaping?"

"As fast as their legs can carry them."

"I understand; but in what direction?"

"Through the air-hole?"

"*Mordieu!* what air-hole?"

"The air-hole opening into the burial vault in the cemetery."

"Do you enter it by the tunnel which you call the underground passage?"

"No, dear M. Chicot. The door of the underground passage was guarded on the outside. Just as the great Cardinal de Guise was going to open it, he heard a Swiss saying: '*Mich durstet*,' which means, it would seem, '*I am thirsty*.'"

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot, "I know what this means, too; so the fugitives took another road?"

"Yes, dear M. Chicot, they are escaping by the vault in the cemetery."

"What does it open into?"

"On one side, into the crypt; on the other, it runs under the Porte Saint-Jacques."

"You lie."

"I, my dear protector!"

"If they had escaped by the vault that opens into the crypt, they must have passed by your cell, and I should have seen them."

"Perfectly correct, dear M. Chicot. But they thought there was no time for such a roundabout journey, and so they are passing out through the air-hole."

"What air-hole?"

"An air-hole opening into the garden and giving some light to the passage."

"So that you"—

"So that, as I am too fat"—

"Well?"

"I could n't get through, and they pulled me back by the legs, because I was in the way of the others."

"But," cried Chicot, his face lighting up with strange and joyous elation, "if you could not get through"—

"I could n't, and yet I did my best. But look at my shoulders, look at my chest."

"Then as he is stouter than you"—

"Who is 'he'?"

"God of heaven!" said Chicot, "if thou dost favor my cause, and he be unable to pass through, I promise thee the largest candle ever made!"

"M. Chicot."

"Get up, you knave."

The monk rose up as fast as he was able.

"Now bring me at once to the air-hole."

"Wherever you wish, my dear friend."

"Walk in front, you rascal, in front."

Gorenflot trotted on as quickly as he could, now and then raising his arms to heaven in protest, for Chicot was stimulating his celerity by frequent applications of the cord he held in his hand.

Both followed the corridor and descended into the garden.

"This way," said Gorenflot, "this way."

"Say nothing, but go on, you varlet."

With a last vigorous effort, the monk reached a clump of trees from the depths of which groans seemed to issue.

"There," said he, "there."

And entirely out of breath, he fell back on the grass.

Chicot advanced three steps and perceived something in motion a little above the ground.

Beside this something, which resembled the hind quarters of the animal styled by Diogenes "a featherless cock with only two feet," lay a sword and monk's robe.

It was evident that the individual who found himself caught in this unfortunate pass had doffed in succession all the objects that could increase his rotundity; so that, being for the nonce deprived of his sword and divested of his frock, he might be said to have been reduced to his simplest expression.

And yet, like Gorenflot, he made useless efforts to disappear completely.

"*Mordieu! ventre bleu! sang dieu!*" the fugitive cried, in a choking voice, "I would rather pass through the midst of the entire guards. A-a-a-h! do not pull so hard, my friends; I shall slip through gradually. I feel I'm advancing — not quickly, but advancing all the same."

"*Ventre de biche!* M. de Mayenne!" murmured Chicot, in ecstasy. "O good and gracious Lord, thou hast won thy candle!"

"I haven't been surnamed Hercule for nothing," continued Mayenne, in the same stifled voice. "I'll raise this stone. Ugh!"

And the effort he made was so violent that the stone really trembled.

"Wait," said Chicot, in an undertone, and he tramped on the ground like a person who was running up and making a great noise.

"They are coming," said several voices from the inside.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, as if he were only just arrived and out of breath.

"Ah! it is you, you abominable monk!"

"Say nothing, monseigneur," murmured several voices, "he takes you for Gorenflot."

"Ah! it's you, at last! you lump of obesity, *pondus immobile*, take that! and that! and that! Aha! so it's really you, *indisgesta moles*, take that again, I say, and that!"

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, whose long unslaked thirst for vengeance was now to be amply gratified, lashed repeatedly all the fleshy parts of his victim that were exposed, with the same cord with which he had already flagellated Gorenflot.

"Silence!" the same voices could be heard whispering, "he takes you for the monk."

And, in fact, Mayenne uttered only a few repressed groans, while making increased efforts to raise the stone.

"Ah, conspirator!" Chicot went on again; "ah, unworthy monk! take this, it is for drunkenness; and this, it is for anger; and this, it is for gluttony; and this, it is for sloth. I regret there are only seven deadly sins. Hold on there! hold on! these are for all the other vices you have."

"M. Chicot!" cried Gorenflot, covered with perspiration; "M. Chicot, have mercy on me."

"Ha! traitor!" continued Chicot, plying the cord faster than ever, "do you feel them? these are for your treason."

"Mercy! mercy!" murmured Gorenflot, who really was under the impression that the strokes were falling on himself and not on Mayenne, "mercy! dear M. Chicot."

But Chicot, instead of stopping, became actually drunk with the spirit of revenge and redoubled his blows.

Mayenne was a man of powerful self-control, but he could no longer refrain from groaning aloud.

"Ah!" Chicot resumed. "Why did it not please God to substitute for thy base-born body, for thy plebeian carcass, the most high and most puissant shoulders of the Duc de Mayenne, to whom I owe ever so many cudgel strokes, for the interest has been accumulating for seven years! Meanwhile, take that, and that, and that."

Gorenflot heaved a sigh and again fell flat on his back.

"Chicot!" shouted the duke.

"Yes, Chicot, I am Chicot; yes, an unworthy servant of the King; Chicot, who has but two weak arms, but would wish he had the hundred arms of Briareus on such a grand occasion."

And Chicot, growing more frenzied every moment, used the cord with such savage violence that the sufferer, collecting all his strength, and stimulated to a tremendous effort by his very agony, lifted the stone, and fell mangled and bleeding into the arms of his friends.

Chicot's last blow struck the empty air.

Then he turned round. The real Gorenflot was in a swoon, the effect of terror, not of pain.

CHAPTER XCI.

WHAT HAPPENED NEAR THE BASTILE WHILE CHICOT WAS PAYING HIS DEBTS IN THE ABBEY OF SAINTE GENEVIÈVE.

It was eleven at night; the Duc d'Anjou, in consequence of the weakness that had seized him in the Rue Saint-Jacques, had retired to his cabinet and was anxiously waiting for a messenger from the Duc de Guise announcing the abdication of the King.

He was walking restlessly backward and forward, going from the door to the window, then entering the antechamber and looking out through the windows there, then turning his eyes on the great clock, the seconds of which made a dismal tinkling in their sheath of gilded wood.

Suddenly he heard a horse pawing the ground in the court-yard; he thought this horse might be that of the messenger, and ran out to the balcony; but the horse he saw was held in check by a groom, who was evidently waiting for his master.

The master soon appeared, coming out from one of the inner apartments; it was Bussy, who, as captain of the prince's guards, had returned to give the password for the night before keeping his appointment.

The duke, on seeing this brave and handsome young man, with whom he had never had any reason to find fault, felt a touch of remorse; but when Bussy came close to a lighted torch held by one of his servants and François perceived that his face was radiant with joy, hope, and happiness, his jealousy revived in all its strength.

Meanwhile, Bussy, ignorant that the duke was watching intently every emotion betrayed by his changing features, after giving the password, wrapped his cloak about his shoulders, leaped into the saddle, clapped spurs to his steed and swept along under the vault, which echoed loudly to his horse's hoofs.

For a moment the prince, uneasy at seeing that the messenger did not arrive, again entertained the idea of sending for him, for he suspected that Bussy, before going in the direction of the Bastile, would stop at his hôtel; but then he had a vision of the young man laughing with Diane over his disappointed love, putting him, the Duc d'Anjou, on a level

with the despised husband, and again his evil instincts got the better of his good ones.

Happiness had lit up Bussy's face with a smile as he was departing; this smile was an insult in the eyes of the prince; he let him go; if he had looked sad and gloomy, he would, perhaps, have retained him.

However, as soon as Bussy was outside the precincts of the Hôtel d'Anjou he slackened his thunderous pace, as if he feared the noise he himself had made. He passed into his hôtel, as the duke had anticipated, and gave his horse over to a groom, who was listening with great respect to a veterinary lecture by Rémy.

"Ah!" said Bussy, recognizing the young doctor; "so it 's you, Rémy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, myself in person."

"And not yet gone to bed?"

"It wants ten minutes of my time for going. I have only just come in, monseigneur. In fact, since I have my patient no longer, the days seem to me to have forty-eight hours."

"There 's nothing preying on your mind, I hope?"

"I 'm afraid there is."

"Is it love?"

"Ah, how often have I told you I have no faith in love, and I use it in general only as material for scientific study."

"Then Gertrude is forsaken?"

"Entirely."

"So you have grown tired?"

"Of being beaten — for that was the direction in which the love of my Amazon had its most significant manifestations — yes, though she is an excellent girl, as girls go."

"And your heart says nothing to you in her favor to-night?"

"Why to-night, monseigneur?"

"Because I would have taken you with me

"To the Bastile quarter?"

"Yes."

"Then you 're going there?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And Monsoreau?"

"At Compiègne, my dear, getting up a hunt for his Majesty."

"Are you sure, monseigneur?"

"He was ordered to do so publicly this morning."

"Ah!"

Rémy remained thoughtful a moment.

"Then?" he asked, after a pause.

"Then I spent the day in thanking God for the happiness he has sent me for to-night, and I intend to spend the night in the enjoyment of that happiness."

"Very well; Jourdain, my sword," said Rémy.

The groom went immediately into the house.

"You have changed your mind, then?" asked Bussy.

"In what respect?"

"Why, you have sent for your sword."

"Yes, I will go with you as far as the door for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"The first is because I fear you may encounter enemies in the streets."

Bussy smiled.

"Oh, yes, laugh away, monseigneur. I know you aren't afraid of enemies, and, in any case, Doctor Rémy wouldn't be much of an ally. Still, two men are not so much exposed to attack as one. My second reason is that I have a lot of good advice to give you."

"Come along, then, my dear Rémy, come along. We will speak of her; next to the pleasure of seeing the woman you love, I know none greater than that of talking about her."

"There are some people even," replied Rémy, "who find a pleasure in talking about her before seeing her."

"By the way, it strikes me," said Bussy, "that the weather is very uncertain."

"Yes, the sky has been at one time cloudy, at another clear. So much the better; I like it so, I'm rather fond of variety. Thanks, Jourdain," he added, addressing the groom who brought him his rapier.

Then turning to the count:

"Now I am at your orders, monseigneur," said he; "let us start."

Bussy took the young doctor's arm, and they both set out for the Bastile.

Rémy had said to the count that he intended giving him a great deal of good advice, and, as soon as they were outside the hôtel, the doctor began to keep his promise. He made use of a number of Latin quotations to prove that Bussy did

wrong to visit Diane that night, instead of remaining quietly in bed, for a man usually fights badly if he has slept badly. Then he passed from the weighty maxims of the faculty to the myths of fable and tried to convince him that it was generally Venus who disarmed Mars.

Bussy smiled; Rémy insisted.

"You see, Rémy," said the count, "when my arm holds a sword, it becomes so assimilated to the latter that the fibres of the flesh take on the hardness and suppleness of steel, while the steel appears to grow warm and animated like living flesh. From that moment my sword is an arm, and my arm a sword. From that moment — you understand me? — strength and energy have really nothing to do in the matter. A sword never grows tired."

"But it sometimes gets blunt."

"Fear nothing."

"Ah, my dear monseigneur," continued Rémy, "the combat in which you engage to-morrow will be like that in which Hercules fought against Antaeus, Theseus against the Minotaur; it will be like that of the Thirty, like that of Bayard — it will be something Homeric, gigantic, impossible. I would have men speak of it in future times as the combat of Bussy, the combat without a parallel; and, as for yourself, it would disappoint me if you received even a scratch."

"Rest easy, my dear Rémy, you shall see wonders. This morning I fenced with four old fire-eaters, who, during eight minutes, were never able to touch me once, while I slashed their doublets to pieces. I bounded like a tiger."

"I do not contradict you, my dear master; but are you sure your legs will be as strong to-morrow as they are to-day?"

Here Bussy and the doctor began talking in Latin, their dialogue being interrupted by frequent bursts of laughter.

At last they arrived at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

"Adieu," said Bussy, "we are at the place."

"What if I were to wait for you?" said Rémy.

"Why should you do so?"

"To make sure that you're home before two o'clock, and have, at least, five or six hours' sound sleep before the duel."

"If I pledge you my word?"

"Oh, that is all I want — Bussy's word! Hang it! things would be at a pretty pass if I were not satisfied with the word of Bussy."

"Well, you have it. In two hours, Rémy, I will be in the hôtel."

"Then adieu, monseigneur."

"Adieu, Rémy."

The young men parted, but Rémy did not go far from where he had been standing.

Rémy watched the count as he advanced toward the house, and, as the absence of Monsoreau made everything secure, he saw him enter, not this time by the window, but through the door, which Gertrude opened for him.

Then he turned back and quietly proceeded through the deserted streets on his way to the Hôtel de Bussy.

As he was passing out of the Place Beaudoyer he noticed five men approaching him, all muffled up in cloaks, and apparently perfectly armed.

For five men to be out at this hour was rather singular. He hid behind a corner of a house that was set back considerably from the street.

When they were within ten yards of him, they halted, and, after a cordial good night, four of them went in different directions, while the fifth remained where he was, apparently considering what he should do.

After a moment or so, the moon issued forth from a cloud and its beams fell upon the face of this night-walker.

"M. de Saint-Luc!" cried Rémy.

Saint-Luc raised his head when he heard his name, and saw a man running up to him.

"Rémy!" he cried, in his turn.

"Rémy himself, but I am happy not to be able to say, at your service: for you seem to be in the very best of health. Would it be indiscreet to ask you, monseigneur, what are you doing so far away from the Louvre?"

"Faith, not at all, my dear fellow. By order of the King I am examining the physiognomy of the city. He said to me: 'Saint-Luc, take a stroll through the streets of Paris, and if you hear any one say I have abdicated, contradict it boldly!'"

"And have you heard anything?"

"Not a whisper. Now, as it is near midnight, as everything is quiet, and as I met nobody but M. de Monsoreau, I have dismissed my friends, and was thinking of returning when you saw me."

"What is that you say? M. de Monsoreau!"

"Yes."

"You met M. de Monsoreau?"

"With a band of armed men, ten or twelve, at the very least."

"M. de Monsoreau! Impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because he ought to be at Compiègne."

"He ought to be, but he is not."

"But the King's order?"

"Pshaw! who obeys the King's orders?"

"You met M. de Monsoreau with ten or twelve men?"

"Certainly."

"And you recognized him?"

"I think so."

"You were only five?"

"My four friends and myself, not a soul more."

"And he did not attack you?"

"He avoided me, on the contrary, and this astonished me exceedingly. When I recognized him, I expected there would be a terrible battle."

"In what direction was he going?"

"In the direction of the Rue de la Tixeranderie."

"Ah! my God!" cried Rémy.

"What?" asked Saint-Luc, frightened by the tone in which the young man spoke.

"M. de Saint-Luc, a great misfortune is about to happen."

"A great misfortune! To whom?"

"To M. de Bussy."

"To Bussy. *Mordieu!* speak out, Rémy. I am his friend, as you know."

"What a misfortune! M. de Bussy believed him at Compiégne."

"Well?"

"Well! he decided to take advantage of his absence."

"So that he is" —

"With Madame Diane."

"Ah!" murmured Saint-Luc, "this is sure to cause trouble."

"Yes. You understand, don't you?" said Rémy. "He had suspicions, either originating with himself or suggested by others, and he pretended to leave Paris, so that he might appear unexpectedly at his home."

"Hold on for a moment," said Saint-Luc, striking his forehead.

"Have you any idea on the subject?" asked Rémy.

"The Duke d'Anjou is at the bottom of all this."

"But it was the Duc d'Anjou who brought about Monsoreau's departure this morning."

"That only strengthens my conviction. Have you good lungs, Rémy?"

"*Corbleu!* They're like a blacksmith's bellows."

"Then let us run without losing a moment. You know the house?"

"Yes."

"Go before me, then."

And the two young men started through the streets at a gait that would have done honor to hunted stags.

"Is he much in advance of us?" asked Rémy, without pausing.

"Who? Monsoreau?"

"Yes."

"Nearly a quarter of an hour," said Saint-Luc, clearing a pile of stones five feet high.

"Oh! if we should only arrive in time!" said Rémy, drawing his sword, so as to be prepared for every event.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE ASSASSINATION.

Bussy felt neither doubtful nor uneasy, and Diane received him without fear, for she was sure of her husband's absence.

Never had the beautiful young woman been so joyous; never had she been so happy. There are certain moments in our lives — moments whose significance is revealed to us by our souls, or rather by the instinct of self-preservation within us — when a man unites his moral faculties with all the physical resources supplied by his senses; he at once concentrates and multiplies his energies, and absorbs life through every pore; life which he may lose at any moment, unconscious of the catastrophe that will force him to relinquish it.

Yet Diane was moved, and moved the more deeply because

she tried to hide her emotion, and, being thus moved by the dread of a threatening morrow, she seemed more tender than usual, for sadness must be an element in all true love, giving to it that perfume of poesy it would otherwise lack; true passion is never light-hearted, and the eyes of the woman that sincerely loves will be oftener moist with tears than sparkling with mirth.

So she began by arresting the amorous advances of the young man; what she had to tell him to-night was that his life was her life; what she had to discuss with him was the surest way to escape.

To conquer was not everything; after conquering, he must flee the wrath of the King; for, in all probability, never would Henri pardon the defeat or death of his favorites.

"And besides," said Diane, with her arm round her lover's neck, and her eyes passionately riveted on his, "are you not the paladin of France? Why make it a point of honor to augment your glory? You tower so high above other men that it would be almost ungenerous in you to seek to rise higher. You would not care to please other women, for you love me and would dread to lose me, would you not, my Louis? Louis, defend your life. I do not say: 'Beware of death!' for I do not think there exists in the whole world a man strong enough, a man powerful enough to kill my Louis, except by treachery; but beware of wounds. You may be wounded, as you well know, since it was through a wound received in fighting these same men that I first made your acquaintance."

"Do not be uneasy," answered Bussy, laughing; "I will take care of my face, anyway; I should not like to be disfigured."

"Oh, take care of your entire person! Let it be as sacred to you, my Bussy, as if it were mine. Think what your agony should be if you saw me return wounded and bleeding. Well, the agony that you would feel would be mine if I saw your blood. Be prudent, my too courageous lion, that is all I ask. Do as did the Roman whose history you read me the other day, to reassure me. Oh! imitate him well; let your three friends fight, and aid the one of the three who is in the most danger; but if two, if three men attack you at once, fly; you can turn back, like Horatius, and when they are separated, kill them one after another."

"Yes, my darling," answered Bussy.

"Oh, you answer without listening, Louis; you look at me, and do not hear me."

"Yes, but I see you, and you are very beautiful!"

"My God! Louis, it is not my beauty that is in question now, but your life, your life, my life — Stay, what I am about to tell you is frightful, but I want you to know it — not that it will render you more valiant, but it may render you more prudent — Well! I shall have the courage to witness the duel!"

"You!"

"Yes, I intend to be present."

"You present? Oh, impossible, Diane!"

"No! Listen: there is in the apartment next to this, as you know, a window that looks into a little court, and gives a side view of the paddock at Les Tournelles."

"Yes, I recollect, the window is about twenty feet from the ground; there is an iron trellis below it, and the birds came the other day to pick up the crumbs I threw on it."

"Then you understand I shall be able to see you, Bussy; therefore, be sure to stand so that I may have a good view of you. You will know I am there and can see me yourself. But no — I must be bereft of reason! — no, do not look at me, your enemy might profit by the movement."

"And kill me? — kill me while I had my eyes fixed on you. If death were my portion and I were allowed to choose the manner of it, no other death, Diane, would please me as well."

"Yes, but death is not your portion; you are not to die, but to live, on the contrary."

"And I will live, do not be alarmed. Besides, I am well seconded; you do not know my friends, but I know them. Antraguet is as much master of the sword as I am; Ribeirac is so impassive on the ground that his eyes and arm alone seem alive, the former to affright his enemy, the latter to strike him. Livarot has the agility of a tiger. The victory will be easy, too easy, Diane. I should like if there were more danger, because then there would be more honor."

"Well, I believe you, my love, and I can smile because I can hope; but listen and promise to obey me."

"Yes, if you do not bid me leave you."

"But that is what I am about to do; I appeal to your reason."

"Then you should not have first deprived me of it."

"YOU WILL GET ME KILLED, MADAME," SAID HE.

"None of your Italian *concetti*, my fine gentleman, but obedience; love is proved by obedience."

"Well, give your orders."

"My darling, your eyes are heavy; you need a good night's rest; leave me."

"Oh! so soon!"

"I am going to say a prayer; then you may kiss me."

"It is to you that prayers ought to be offered, just as they are offered to the angels."

"And do you not believe that the angels pray to God?" said Diane, kneeling.

And from the depths of her heart, with an upturned gaze that seemed to penetrate the ceiling, and fly in search of God through the azure fields of heaven, she said:

"O Lord, if it be thy will that thy servant live happy and do not die of despair, protect him whom thou hast placed in my path, that I may love him and love him only."

When she had finished her prayer, Bussy stooped down to fold her in his arms and raise her lips to his. Suddenly a pane of glass was shattered into fragments, then the window itself, and three armed men appeared on the balcony, while a fourth climbed over the balustrade. The latter was masked and held in one hand a pistol, in the other a naked sword.

Bussy was for a moment riveted to the floor, paralyzed by the terrible shriek uttered by Diane as she flung herself on his neck.

The man in the mask made a sign, and his three companions advanced a step; one of the three was armed with an arquebuse.

Bussy put Diane aside with his left hand, and drew his sword with his right.

Then, falling back, he slowly lowered the weapon, never taking his eyes off his adversaries.

"On! my brave fellows, on!" cried a sepulchral voice from beneath what appeared to be a mask of velvet; "he is half dead; fear has killed him."

"You are mistaken," said Bussy; "I never fear."

Diane drew near him.

"Stand aside, Diane," he said, firmly.

But Diane, instead of obeying, again flung herself on his neck.

"You will get me killed, madame," said he.

Diane drew back, leaving him entirely uncovered.

She saw the only way to help her lover was to obey him implicitly and passively.

"Ah!" said the same hollow voice, "so it is really M. de Bussy. I would not believe it, simpleton that I am. What a friend, in good sooth, what a faithful, what an excellent friend!"

Bussy bit his lips and said nothing; but he looked round to see what means of defence were within his reach when the fighting should begin.

"He learns," continued the same voice, but with an accent of mockery that rendered its thrilling vibrations more terrible still, "he learns that the grand huntsman is absent, that he has left his wife alone, that this wife is alarmed by her loneliness, and so he comes to cheer her with his society — And when does he do this? Why, on the eve of a duel! What a kind and excellent friend is the Seigneur de Bussy!"

"Ah! it is you, M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy. "'T is well. Fling away your mask. I know now with whom I have to deal."

"Yes, I will do so," answered the grand huntsman, and he threw off the black velvet mask.

Diane uttered a faint cry.

The count was as livid as a corpse; his smile was the smile of one of the damned.

"Oh, let us have done with this, monsieur," said Bussy; "I am not fond of such oratorical outbursts; it was all very well for the heroes of Homer, who were demigods, to talk before fighting; but I am a man; a man, however, who knows not fear; fight or let me pass."

The answer of Monsoreau was a hoarse, discordant laugh that made Diane shudder, but excited the most violent anger in Bussy.

"Stand out of my way! let me pass, I say!" repeated the young man, whose blood, for a moment driven back to his heart, now surged to his temples.

"Oh! — 'Let me pass!'" answered Monsoreau. "Would you please to repeat that again, M. de Bussy?"

"Then let us cross swords and make an end of the matter. I want to return home, and I live far from here."

During this time the heads of two more men rose above the bars of the balcony, and these two men, striding over the balustrade, went and placed themselves beside their comrades.

"Four and two make six," said Bussy; "where are the others?"

"They are waiting at the door," answered the grand huntsman.

Diane fell upon her knees, and, although she tried to keep back her sobs, Bussy heard them.

After a quick glance at her, he reflected for a moment, turned his eyes on the count, and said:

"My dear count, you know that I am a man of honor?"

"Yes," answered Monsoreau, "your honor is as stainless as the chastity of madame."

"Well, monsieur," said Bussy, with a slight shake of the head, "your words are bitter, but they are deserved, and all that must be settled for in good season. However, as I have an engagement to-morrow with four gentlemen whom you know, and as their claim on me is prior to yours, I ask your permission to be allowed to retire to-night, pledging you my word that you shall find me again, when and wherever you like."

Monsoreau shrugged his shoulders.

"Hear me," said Bussy; "I swear by the living God, monsieur, that when I have given satisfaction to Schomberg, D'Épernon, Quélus, and Maugiron, I shall be at your service, wholly and entirely at your service, and at yours alone. Should they kill me, your vengeance will be executed through their agency, and all will be over; should I be, on the other hand, in a condition to meet you" —

Monsoreau turned to his men.

"Forward, my brave fellows!" said he; "fall on him!"

"Ah!" cried Bussy, "I was mistaken; it is not a duel, it is an assassination."

"You think so, do you?" retorted Monsoreau.

"Yes, I see it now: we were each of us mistaken with regard to the other. But have a care, monsieur, the Duc d'Anjou will take offence at this."

"It is he who sends me," answered Monsoreau.

Bussy shuddered. Diane raised her hands to heaven, with a groan.

"In that case," said the young man, "my appeal is to Bussy alone. Look out for yourselves, cut-throats!"

And, with a turn of the hand, he upset the prie-Dieu, drew a table toward him and placed a chair on top of it, so that in

a second he had improvised a rampart between himself and his enemies.

His action had been so rapid that the bullet fired at him from an arquebuse struck only the prie-Dieu, into which it penetrated far; but, in the meantime, Bussy had thrown down a magnificent side-table of the time of François I. and added it to his defences.

Diane discovered that this last piece of furniture had been so placed as to hide her; she felt that only by her prayers could she aid Bussy, and she prayed. Bussy glanced at her, then at his assailants, then at his improvised rampart.

"Come on, now," he said; "but have a care, my sword stings."

The bravoes, urged onward by Monsoreau, advanced toward Bussy, who awaited them with body bent forward and flaming eyes. One of them attempted to sieze the prie-Dieu, but, before his hand had touched this part of the bulwark, the count's sword passed through an opening and ran through the small of his arm up to the shoulder. The man screamed and retreated to the window.

Bussy then heard rapid steps in the corridor, and believed he was caught between two fires.

He rushed to the door to shoot the bolts, but, before he reached it, it was opened.

He recoiled a step to put himself in an attitude to meet his new enemies as well as his old ones.

Two men rushed in through the door.

"Ah! dear master," cried one of them, "are we in time?"

"Rémy!" said the count.

"And I, too," cried another voice; "it would seem an assassination is taking place here!"

Bussy recognized the voice, and uttered a roar of joy.

"Saint-Luc!" he cried.

"Myself."

"Aha! my dear M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy, "I believe you had better let us pass now; for, if you do not step aside, we will pass over you."

"Three more men!" shouted Monsoreau.

And three new bravoes appeared above the balustrade.

"Why, they must have an entire army!" said Saint-Luc.

"Shield him, O Lord!" prayed Diane.

"Harlot!" cried Monsoreau, and he advanced to strike her

Bussy saw the movement. Agile as a tiger, he bounded over his intrenchment; his sword met Monsoreau's, he made a quick lunge and touched his throat; but the distance was too great; the wound was only a scratch.

At the same time, five or six men rushed on Bussy.

One of these men fell under the sword of Saint-Luc.

"Forward!" cried Rémy.

"No, no, not forward," said Bussy; "on the contrary, Rémy, carry away Diane."

Monsoreau uttered a yell, and snatched a sword from one of the newcomers.

Rémy hesitated.

"But you?" he asked.

"Take her away! take her away!" cried Bussy. "I confide her to your care."

"O God! O God!" murmured Diane, "aid him!"

"Come, madame," said Rémy.

"Never! never! I will never leave him!"

Rémy seized her in his arms.

"Bussy!" cried Diane; "Bussy, help! help!"

The poor woman was mad; she no longer distinguished friends from enemies; whoever parted her from Bussy was her mortal foe.

"Go, go," said Bussy, "I will be with you soon."

"Yes," howled Monsoreau, "you will be with her; it is what I hope."

A shot was fired. Bussy saw Rémy totter, reel, and then fall, dragging Diane down with him.

Bussy uttered a cry, and turned.

"It is nothing," said Rémy, "it was I that was struck by the bullet; she is safe."

Three men flung themselves on Bussy when his attention was distracted by Rémy. Saint-Luc came between these three men and Bussy, and one of the three fell.

The two others recoiled.

"Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "Saint-Luc, in the name of her you love, save Diane!"

"But you?"

"I? I am a man."

Saint-Luc ran to Diane, who was on her knees, took her in his arms, and disappeared with her through the door.

"Help!" cried Monsoreau; "those on the stairs come up!"

"Ah! miscreant! Ah! coward!" cried Bussy.

Monsoreau retired behind his men.

With a back stroke Bussy cleft open a head; with a lunge he pierced a breast.

"That rids me of some of this rubbish," he said; then he returned behind his intrenchment.

"Fly, master, fly!" murmured Rémy.

"What! fly before assassins!"

Then leaning toward the young man:

"Diane must escape," said he; "but how do you feel?"

"Look out!" said Rémy, "look out!"

Four men were rushing in through the door opening on the stairs.

He was between two bands.

But he had only one thought.

"Diane!" he cried, "Diane!"

Then, without losing a second, he swooped down on these four men. Taken by surprise, two of them fell, one wounded, the other dead.

Then Monsoreau advanced, and, with a bound backward, Bussy was again behind his rampart.

"Shoot in the bolts," cried the grand huntsman, "turn the key; we have him now, we have him."

During this time, Rémy, making a final effort, had crawled up to Bussy, as if he would make his body a part of the rampart.

Both sides paused for a moment.

With his legs bent, his body holding fast to the wall, and his sword pointing straight before him, Bussy cast a quick glance around.

Seven men lay on the floor, nine were standing. Bussy counted them with his eyes.

But when he saw those nine swords, and heard Monsoreau trying to lash into fury those who held them, when he felt his feet splashing in blood, this hero, who had never known fear, beheld the spectre of death looming out of the depths of the chamber and beckoning him with its dismal smile.

"Of those nine," said he to himself, "I shall kill five more, but the four left will kill me. I have only strength for ten minutes' more fighting. Well! I must do during these ten minutes what man never did before and shall never do again!"

Then taking off his cloak and wrapping it about his left arm as a buckler, with a bound he was in the centre of the room, as if he deemed it unworthy of his fame to fight any longer under cover.

Then his sword shot out in this direction and that, like the fang of a coiled viper; thrice it pierced the leather of a shoulder-belt or the buff of a jacket, and thrice a thin thread of blood ran down to his right hand along the groove of the blade.

The cloak was hacked to pieces.

When two of their men fell and a third retreated the tactics of the assassins changed; they abandoned the sword; some fell on him with the butt-ends of their muskets, others fired off the pistols they had hitherto refrained from using. By his wonderful dexterity he avoided the bullets, now stooping, now leaping aside. In this supreme hour all his energies were multiplied; not only did he see, hear, and act, but he seemed to divine every movement of his enemies, however secret or sudden. The present moment was for Bussy the moment when the created being attains the very acme of perfection; he was less than a god, for he was mortal; but he was surely more than a man.

Then he thought that to kill Monsoreau was to end the combat; he searched for him among his assailants. But the grand huntsman, as calm as Bussy was excited, was stationed behind his cut-throats, loading their pistols or firing himself from his place of shelter.

But it was a simple thing for Bussy to make an opening; he dashed through the midst of the bandits, and was face to face with Monsoreau.

The latter, who had a loaded pistol in his hand, aimed and fired.

The bullet struck Bussy's sword, breaking off the blade six inches from the hilt.

"Disarmed!" cried Monsoreau, "disarmed!"

Bussy recoiled a step, and, as he did so, picked up his broken blade.

In an instant he had it fastened to his wrist by means of his handkerchief.

And the fight was on anew, exhibiting the unheard of spectacle of a man almost without arms, but also almost without wounds, holding six armed men at bay and making a rampart of the ten corpses piled up before him.

The fight was on anew and became more terrible than ever. While his men were again assailing Bussy, Monsoreau, guessing that his enemy was seeking for a weapon, drew to himself all that were within the young man's reach.

Bussy was surrounded. The fragment of his sword, hacked and bent, shook in his hand; his arm was stiff from fatigue; he looked around; suddenly one of the corpses, as if restored to life, rose on its knees and placed in his hand a long and excellent rapier.

The corpse was Rémy; his last effort in life was an act of self-devotion.

Bussy shouted with joy, and leaped back, to free his hand from the handkerchief and to get rid of his broken sword, which was now useless.

During the interval, Monsoreau approached Rémy, and fired a bullet into his brain.

Rémy fell back, with his skull shattered, this time to rise no more.

Bussy uttered a cry, or rather a roar.

Now that he could defend himself, his energy returned. With one hissing sweep of his sword, he cut off a wrist on his right and laid open a cheek on his left.

This double stroke cleared his way to the door.

As nimble as he was strong, he flung himself against it, and, with a violent exertion of his strength that made the wall tremble, he tried to break it in. But the bolts resisted.

Exhausted by the endeavor, Bussy dropped his right arm, while with his left he attempted to draw back the bolts behind him, but also facing his enemies.

During this time, he received a bullet in his thigh, and two swords pierced his sides.

But he had succeeded in drawing the bolts and turning the key.

With a roar of rage, and sublime in that rage, he swept one of the most ferocious of the bandits from his path, leaped at Monsoreau and wounded him in the breast.

The grand huntsman shrieked out an oath.

"Ah!" cried Bussy, pulling the door open, "I begin to think I shall escape."

The four men flung down their weapons and threw themselves on Bussy; their swords could not reach him, for his marvellous address rendered him invulnerable. They tried to

stifle him. But, striking them now with the pommel of his sword, now with the blade, he knocked down some and slashed others. Twice did Monsoreau come within reach of the young man's rapier and twice was he wounded.

But three men seized the hilt of his sword and tore it from his grasp.

Bussy picked up a carved wooden trivet, which was used as a foot-stool, and with it smote three men, knocking down two of them, but breaking it on the shoulder of the third, who held his ground, and plunged his dagger into Bussy's chest.

The young hero seized him by the wrist, pulled out the dagger and, with a rapid turn, forced the cut-throat to stab himself.

The last of the bandits jumped through the window.

Bussy advanced two steps to follow him, but Monsoreau, who was lying among the corpses, lifted his arm and planted a knife in his hip.

Bussy uttered a cry, looked round for a sword, found one, and drove it with such force through the grand huntsman's breast that he pinned him to the floor.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bussy, "I know not if death await me, but, at least, I have witnessed yours."

Monsoreau tried to answer; but only a sigh — his last one — escaped from the half-open lips.

Bussy then dragged himself to the corridor, while the blood streamed from the wound in his thigh, and especially from the one in his hip.

He threw a last look behind him.

The moon had just emerged from a cloud in all its splendor; its beams entered this chamber inundated with blood, shone on the window, and illuminated the walls that were hacked by swords and pierced by balls, and lightly touched, as they passed, the pale features of the dead, many of whose faces bore, even in death, the savage and menacing gaze of the assassin.

At the sight of this field of battle, peopled by his valor, wounded though he was, dying though he might be, Bussy felt his soul exalted by a pride that was sublime.

As he had said, he had done what no man but he could do.

There now remained nothing to be done but to escape, to fly; he could fly without dishonor, for he was flying before the dead.

But all was not over for the luckless young hero.

When he came to the staircase he saw the glitter of arms in the courtyard ; a shot was fired ; a bullet crashed through his shoulder.

The courtyard was guarded.

Then he thought of the little window through which Diane had expressed her intention of watching the combat on the next day, and he dragged himself to it as quickly as he could.

It was open, and through it shone the light of the innumerable stars that gemmed the beautiful sky.

Bussy shut and bolted the door behind him.

He raised himself up to the window with great difficulty, bestrode the sill, and measured with his eyes the distance to the iron trellis, wondering if he could jump to the other side of it.

" Oh ! I shall never have the strength ! " he murmured.

But at that moment he heard steps on the stairs ; it was the second band coming up.

He was now utterly defenceless ; he must make an effort. With the aid of the only hand and the only foot that could be used by him, he took a leap.

But, while doing so, the sole of his boot slipped on the stone.

His feet had trampled in so much blood !

He fell on the iron points; some of them penetrated his body ; others caught his clothes, and he hung suspended.

Then he thought of the only friend now left him in the world.

" Saint-Luc ! " he cried, " help ! Saint-Luc ! help ! "

" Ah ! so it is you, M. de Bussy," answered a voice that came from a clump of trees.

Bussy started. The voice was not the voice of Saint-Luc.

" Saint-Luc ! " he cried again, " help ! help ! have no fear about Diane. I have killed Monsoreau."

He hoped Saint-Luc was hiding in the neighborhood and would come in response to these tidings.

" Ah ! our friend Monsoreau is killed, then ? " said another voice.

" Yes."

" Capital ! "

And Bussy saw two men advancing from the trees ; they were both masked.

" Gentlemen," said Bussy, " gentlemen, help a poor gentleman who can yet escape if you aid him."

"What do you say, monseigneur?" asked one of the two, in a low voice.

"How thoughtless you are!" said the other.

"Monseigneur!" cried Bussy, who had heard them, for the desperate nature of his position had sharpened his senses to the highest degree; "monseigneur! save me and I will pardon you for betraying me."

"You hear?" said the masked man.

"What are your orders?"

"Of course to save him."

Then he added in a tone of mockery and with a smile which his mask concealed:

"From further suffering."

Bussy turned his head in the direction of the voice that had dared to speak jeeringly at such a moment.

"Oh! I am lost!" he murmured.

At the same moment the muzzle of an arquebuse was placed against his breast and the weapon was fired. Bussy's head fell on his shoulders, and his hands stiffened.

"Assassin!" said he, "be accursed!"

And he expired with the name of Diane on his lips.

Drops of his blood fell from the trellis upon him who had been addressed as monseigneur.

"Is he dead?" cried several men, who, after breaking open the door, appeared at the window.

"Yes," answered Aurilly, "but fly; remember that his highness the Duc d'Anjou was the friend and protector of M. de Bussy."

The men asked no better than to fly; they vanished.

The duke heard the sound of their footsteps as they fled until it died away and was lost in the distance.

"Now, Aurilly," said he, "go upstairs and throw Monsoreau's body out of the window."

Aurilly did so. He recognized the grand huntsman's body among the heaps of corpses, raised it on his shoulder, and, as he had been ordered, threw it out of the window; as it fell it spattered the clothes of the duke with blood.

François rummaged the pockets in the grand huntsman's jerkin, and drew out of one of them the act of alliance he had signed with his own princely hand.

"I have got what I was looking for," said he. "We have nothing more to do here."

"And Diane?" asked Aurilly from the window.

"Oh, faith, I 'm no longer in love with her, and, as she did not recognize us, untie her. Untie also Saint-Luc, and let both of them go where they like."

Aurilly disappeared.

"This document won't make me king of France," said the duke, tearing the act into pieces; "but neither will it cause me to be beheaded for high treason."

CHAPTER XCIII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT FOUND HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER BETWEEN A GIBBET AND AN ABBEY.

The conspiracy we have described retained its comedy features to the very end; neither the Swiss, who had been, as it were, stationed at the mouth of this river of intrigue, nor the French guards, who had lain in wait at one of its confluents and spread their nets for the big fishes, had been able to catch even the small fry.

All had managed to escape through the burial-vault.

No one was seen to leave the abbey; and this was the reason why Crillon, after the door was broken in, put himself at the head of thirty men and invaded the convent of Sainte Geneviève, accompanied by the King.

The silence of death reigned throughout the vast and gloomy structure.

Crillon, being a trained warrior, would have preferred a great uproar; he feared an ambush.

But in vain were scouts sent in advance, in vain were doors and windows opened, in vain was the crypt searched in every direction — the place seemed entirely deserted.

The King marched at the head of the soldiers, sword in hand, and crying at the top of his voice:

"Chicot! Chicot!"

Nobody answered.

"I wonder have they killed him?" said Henri. "Mordieu! if they have they shall pay for my jester the full value of a nobleman."

"You are right, sire," answered Crillon, "for he is one of the bravest men that ever lived."

Chicot did not reply, for the simple reason that he was then engaged in flagellating M. de Mayenne and took so keen a pleasure in the task that he neither saw nor heard what was passing around him.

However, when the duke had vanished, when Gorenflot had fainted, as nothing now diverted his attention, he heard the call and recognized the royal voice.

"This way, my son, this way," he shouted, with all the strength of his lungs, while at the same time trying to raise Gorenflot to a sitting position.

He succeeded and propped him up against a tree.

The force he was obliged to expend on this charitable work robbed his voice of some of its sonorousness, so that for a moment Henri believed the cry he heard was the cry of a person in pain.

It was nothing of the sort, however; on the contrary, Chicot was in a state of the most delightful exultation and triumph. But when his eyes were turned on the monk, who was, certainly, in most piteous case, he asked himself whether he ought to let daylight into that treacherous paunch or treat that preposterous wine-barrel with clemency.

He stared, then, at Gorenflot as Augustus must have once stared for a moment at Cinna.

Gorenflot returned gradually to consciousness, and, stupid as he was, he had no illusion as to what he might expect; besides, he was not unlike those animals which, being constantly the prey of man, have an instinctive feeling that no hand will ever touch them except to beat them. no mouth ever come near them except to devour them.

Such was the state of his mind when he again opened his eyes.

"M. Chicot!" he cried.

"Hum! so you're not dead?" said the Gascon.

"My kind friend," continued the monk, making an effort to join his hands before his enormous stomach, "surely you would not deliver your Gorenflot to his persecutors?"

"Rascal!" answered Chicot, but in a tone the tenderness of which was poorly disguised.

Gorenflot set up a howl.

Having succeeded at last in bringing his hands together, he wrung them.

"I who have eaten so many good dinners with you," he cried, in a voice choked by tears; "I who have drunk with you, and that so gracefully and elegantly that you have called me the King of the Sponges; I who used to be so fond of the fat pullets you ordered at the *Corne d'Abondance* that I never left anything behind me except the bones!"

This climax appeared sublime to Chicot and decided him in favor of clemency.

"Oh, Lord! there they are!" cried Gorenflot, trying to rise, but not succeeding; "there they are! they are coming, I 'm a dead man! Oh! dear, dear M. Chicot, help me!"

And the monk, not being able to get up, adopted the easier plan of throwing himself flat on the ground.

"Rise," said Chicot.

"You forgive me?"

"We 'll see."

"You have beaten me so much that I think I 'm punished enough already."

Chicot burst out laughing. The wits of the poor monk were so addled that he actually believed he had received the lashes served out to Mayenne.

"You are laughing, my good M. Chicot?" said he.

"Of course I 'm laughing, you donkey."

"Then I shall live."

"Perhaps."

"Oh, you would never laugh if your Gorenflot was going to die."

"The matter does not rest with me," answered Chicot, "it rests with the King; the King alone has the power of life and death."

Making a strong effort, Gorenflot managed to get on his two knees.

At this moment the darkness was dispelled by a dazzling light; men in embroidered costumes, and with swords that flashed in the glare of the torches, surrounded the two friends.

"Oh! Chicot! my dear Chicot!" cried the King, "how glad I am to see you again!"

"You hear, my dear M. Chicot," said the monk, in an undertone, "this great prince is glad to see you again."

"Well?"

"Well! in his gladness he won't refuse you anything you ask of him; ask him to pardon me."

"What! ask a favor of the abominable Herod?"

"Hush! hush! silence, my dear M. Chicot."

"Well, sire," inquired Chicot, turning round toward the King, "how many of them have you caught?"

"*Confiteor!*" said Gorenflot.

"Not one," answered Crillon. "The traitors! they must have found some avenue of escape unknown to us."

"It is probable," said Chicot.

"But you saw them?" asked the King.

"Certainly, I saw them."

"All?"

"From the first to the last."

"You recognized them, I suppose?"

"No, sire."

"How is it you did not recognize them?"

"I should say I recognized one of them, and yet" —

"And yet?"

"His face was n't the part of him I recognized, either, sire."

"And whom did you recognize?"

"M. de Mayenne."

"M. de Mayenne? The man to whom you owed a" —

"Well, we are now quits, sire."

"Ah, tell me all about it, Chicot."

"Later on, my son, later on; let us now give our attention to the present."

"*Confiteor!*" repeated Gorenflot.

"Ah! you have made a prisoner," said Crillon, suddenly, laying his heavy hand on Gorenflot, who in spite of the resistance afforded by his enormous bulk, bent under the pressure.

The monk became speechless.

Chicot did not answer at once, but allowed all the anguish that can spring from the most abject terror to fill the unfortunate monk's heart for a moment.

Gorenflot nearly fainted a second time when he saw so many wrathful faces around him.

At last, after a silence during which Gorenflot fancied he heard the trumpet of the last judgment sounding in his ears, Chicot said:

"Sire, look well at that monk."

One of the bystanders brought a torch close to Gorenflot's face; he closed his eyes, thinking that thus he might pass more easily from this world into the next.

"The preacher Gorenflot!" cried Henri.

"*Confiteor, confiteor, confiteor,*" repeated the monk, rapidly.

"Gorenflot himself," answered Chicot.

"He who"—

"Yes," interrupted the Gascon.

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, with an air of satisfaction.

The perspiration that streamed down Gorenflot's cheeks would have filled a bucket.

And there was some reason for this. The sound of clashing swords rang out, as if the weapons themselves had become endowed with life and were quivering with anger.

Some of those present approached him with menacing looks.

Gorenflot felt rather than saw they were near him, and uttered a feeble cry.

"Wait," said Chicot, "the King must know everything."

And he took Henri aside.

"My son," said he, in a whisper, "give God thanks for allowing this holy man to be born, some thirty-five years ago; for it is he who has saved us all."

"How is that?"

"It was he who related to me the whole conspiracy, from Alpha to Omega."

"When?"

"Nearly a week ago; so that if your Majesty's enemies ever find him, he is a dead man."

Gorenflot heard only the last words.

"A dead man!"

And he fell flat on the ground again.

"So worthy a man," said the King, casting a friendly glance on this mass of flesh which, to the eye of any sensible man, represented only an inordinate lump of matter calculated to absorb and quench any sparks of intelligence that resided within it, "so worthy a man must be shielded by our protection."

Gorenflot caught in its flight that benevolent look, and, like the mask of the ancient parasite, smiled on one side of his face down to the teeth, and whimpered on the other up to his ear.

"And you will do well to shield him, my King," answered Chicot, "for he is one of the most astonishingly meritorious servants you have."

"What do you think, then, I ought to do with him?" inquired the King.

"I think that as long as he remains in Paris he will run a great risk."

"If I gave him guards?" said the King.

Gorenflot heard this suggestion of Henri.

"Good!" said he. "It looks as if I should get off with imprisonment. I should certainly prefer that to the strappado, if they feed me as well."

"No," said Chicot, "it is n't necessary; all you have to do is to let me take him with me."

"Where?"

"To my lodgings."

"Then take him, but return to the Louvre; I am going there to find my friends and prepare them for to-morrow."

"Rise, reverend father," said Chicot to the monk.

"He can jeer at me! Oh, what a hard heart!" murmured Gorenflot.

"Get up, you beast," added Chicot, in an undertone, hitting him in the back with his knee.

"Ah! I know I have deserved this!" cried Gorenflot.

"What 's that he says?" inquired the King.

"Sire," returned Chicot, "he remembers all his fatigues, he is recounting all his tortures, and, as I have promised him your Majesty's protection, he says, with a full consciousness of his merits: 'I know I have deserved this!'"

"Poor devil!" said the King. "Be sure you take good care of him, Chicot."

"Oh, you may be quite sure I shall. He 'll want for nothing, as long as he is with me."

"Ah! M. Chicot!" cried Gorenflot, "my dear M. Chicot, where are they going to take me?"

"You 'll soon know. Meanwhile, thank his Majesty, thou mountain of iniquity, thank his Majesty."

"For what?"

"Thank him, I tell you."

"Sire," stammered Gorenflot, "since your gracious Majesty"—

"Yes," interrupted Henri, "I know all you did for me after your journey to Lyons, during the night of the League, and, finally, to-day. Rest assured you shall be rewarded according to your deserts."

Gorenflot heaved a sigh.

"Where is Panurge?" asked Chicot.

"In the stable, poor beast!"

"Well, go and get him; then ride back on him here."

"Yes, M. Chicot."

And the monk went away as fast as he could, astonished that no guards followed him.

"Now, my son," said Chicot, "keep twenty men for your own escort, and send ten others with M. de Crillon."

"Where am I to send them?"

"To the Hôtel d'Anjou; let them bring your brother back with them."

"Why should I do so?"

"To prevent him from escaping a second time."

"Why, has my brother"—

"Do you think you acted unwisely in following my advice to-day?"

"No, *par la mordieu!*"

"Then do as I tell you."

Henri ordered the colonel of the French guards to bring the Duc d'Anjou to the Louvre.

Crillon, who was anything but partial to the prince, started immediately.

"And what are you going to do?" inquired Henri.

"Oh, I am waiting for my saint."

"But you 'll come to the Louvre?"

"In an hour."

"Then I 'll leave you."

"Go, my son."

Henri went off, followed by the rest of his attendants.

As for Chicot, he took his way to the stables. When he entered the courtyard, he saw Gorenflot mounted on Panurge.

The idea never entered the poor wretch's head of attempting to escape the fate he believed awaited him.

"Come," said Chicot, taking Panurge by the halter, "let us make haste, we are expected."

Gorenflot did not offer the slightest resistance, but he shed so many tears that he was actually growing thinner.

CHAPTER XCIV.

IN WHICH CHICOT GUESSES WHY D'ÉPERNON HAD BLOOD ON HIS FEET AND NONE IN HIS CHEEKS.

The King, on returning to the Louvre, found his friends had retired and were sleeping peacefully.

Historical events have this singular influence: they lend to the incidents that have preceded them a certain reflected grandeur.

Those of our readers, then, who are interested in the events that were to take place on this very morning — for it was two o'clock when the King returned to the Louvre — and who will have their interest enhanced by their prevision of what was to occur, will, perhaps, also be somewhat moved by witnessing the visit of the King, after almost losing his crown, to his three friends, those friends who, in a few hours, will risk their lives in his cause.

The poet, whose privilege it is, not to foresee, but to divine, will, we are sure, find a certain melancholy charm in the aspect of those youthful faces, now reposing tranquilly, like brothers, in the household dormitory, on couches stationed side by side, a smile of confidence playing on their lips.

Henri stepped softly among them, followed by Chicot, who, after seeing that his friend Gorenflot was placed in safe keeping, had made his way back to the palace.

One bed was empty — D'Épernon's.

"Not returned yet? the thoughtless fellow!" murmured the King; "what an unfortunate fool he must be! He is to fight Bussy, the bravest man in France, Bussy, the most dangerous man in the whole world, and this is all the concern the matter gives him!"

"It looks that way at present," said Chicot.

"Some of my people must at once go in search of M. d'Épernon, and bring him back!" cried Henri. "Some one go for Miron, too; I want him to send this madcap fast asleep, whether he likes it or not; a sound sleep will strengthen and toughen him, will put him in good condition to defend himself."

"Sire," said an usher, "M. d'Épernon has just come in."

D'Épernon had, in fact, come in a little before. When he

learned of the King's return, and suspected that his Majesty would visit the common apartment of the minions, he stole rapidly thither, hoping that he might get there before Henri, and that his absence would not be discovered.

But several persons were looking for him, and, as we have seen, his arrival was announced to the King.

Seeing that he was in for a scolding, he felt considerably embarrassed as he approached the threshold.

"Ah! so here you are at last!" said Henri; "come here, you wretched scamp, and look at your friends."

D'Épernon looked round him, and signified by a gesture that he had seen them.

"Look at your friends: they have some common sense; they understand the importance of what is about to take place to-morrow, while you, wretch that you are, instead of praying as they have done, and sleeping as they are doing now, have been running through the streets and spending your time in every sort of debauchery. *Corbleu!* how pale you are! A nice figure you'll present to-morrow, when you look such a wreck to-night!"

D'Épernon's pallor was, indeed, very noticeable, though the last remark of the King called up a little color in his cheeks for a moment.

"Well," continued Henri, "go to bed now; I order you to do so, and sleep if you can. Do you think you can sleep?"

"I sleep! of course," answered D'Épernon, as if such a question was almost an insult.

"But what time have you for sleeping? Do you know that you are to fight at daybreak? Do you know that in this unfortunate season the sun rises at four o'clock? It is now two; so you have barely two hours to rest."

"Oh, a great deal can be done in two hours, if you employ them wisely," D'Épernon answered.

"Then you'll sleep?"

"Soundly, I assure you, sire."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Why so?"

"Because you are excited, you are thinking of to-morrow. Alas! you are right, for to-morrow is to-day; but I try to forget it, try to imagine that the fatal hour is still distant."

"Sire, I will sleep, I promise you," said D'Épernon. "But how can I sleep if your Majesty will not let me sleep?"

"That 's very true," said Chicot.

D'Épernon undressed and got into bed, all the time looking so calm and confident that Chicot, as well as the King, considered his bearing a good omen for the coming duel.

"He 's as brave as Cæsar," answered the King.

"So brave," said Chicot, scratching his ear, "that, upon my soul, I can't make head or tail of it."

"Look, he is already asleep."

Chicot drew near the bed, for he could not believe that D'Épernon's serenity was as imperturbable as such a profound slumber would indicate.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked the King.

"See!"

And Chicot pointed to D'Épernon's boots.

"Blood!" murmured the King.

"Yes, he has been walking in blood, my son. What a regular Hector our friend is!"

"Do you think he is wounded?" asked the King, anxiously.

"Nonsense! he would have told us if he were. And besides, unless he were wounded, like Achilles, in the heel" —

"Stop! his doublet is also spotted; look at the sleeve. What has happened, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he killed some one," answered Chicot.

"Why should he do so?"

"To keep his hand in."

"It is strange, is it not?" said the King.

Chicot scratched his ear with a much more serious air than usual.

"Hum! hum!" he muttered.

"You don't answer."

"Yes, I do. I say 'hum! hum!' That means a great deal, in my opinion."

"Good God!" cried Henri, "what is this that is happening around me, and what sort of a future am I to expect? Luckily, to-morrow" —

"To-day, my son; you are always making a jumble of things."

"Yes, you are right."

"Well, what about to-day, then?"

"To-day I shall be quite easy in my mind.'

"Why do you think so?"

"Because these infernal Angevines will be slain."

"You believe so, Henri?"

"I am sure of it; my men are brave."

"I never heard that the Angevines were cowards."

"I don't say so, either; but my friends are so strong. Look at Schomberg's arms. Did you ever see such splendid muscle?"

"But did you ever see Antraguet's?"

"And then, see what an expression of resolution and command there dwells on Quélus's lips; and look at Maugiron's forehead, what an air of imperious pride sits on it even in his sleep. Those who own such faces cannot fail to conquer. When the lightning that flashes from these eyes strikes their enemies, their enemies will be half vanquished."

"Ah! my dear friend," said Chicot, sadly shaking his head, "I know of eyes as bright under brows as haughty that shoot forth flashes as terrible as those upon which you rely. Is this all you have to trust to?"

"No, come and I will show you something."

"Where?"

"In my cabinet."

"And does this something you are about to show me give you assurance of victory?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then."

"Wait a moment."

And Henri approached the couches of the young men.

"Why?" inquired Chicot.

"I do not want to do anything to-day, or rather to-morrow, that might sadden and depress them. And so I wish to bid them farewell now."

Chicot nodded.

"Do so, my son," said he.

The tone of voice in which Chicot uttered these few words was so melancholy that it sent a shudder through Henri's veins and brought the tears to his eyes.

"Adieu, my friends," he murmured; "adieu, my loyal friends."

Chicot turned his head; his heart was no more marble than that of the King. But his eyes were soon carried back, as if by an irresistible attraction, to the faces of the young favorites.

Henri stooped down and imprinted a light kiss on each of their foreheads.

The faint light of a taper alone illumined the scene, giving a funereal tinge to the draperies of the chamber and the countenances of the actors.

Chicot was not superstitious; but when Henri's lips touched the foreheads of Maugiron, Quélus, and Schomberg, it looked to his imagination as if a living man, weighed down by a sorrow that was inconsolable, had come to bid a last farewell to the dead who were already lying in their tombs.

"Queer!" said Chicot to himself, "I never had this feeling before; poor boys!"

Shortly after the King had finished embracing his friends, D'Épernon opened his eyes to see if he had left the room.

He had just passed out from it, leaning on Chicot's arm.

D'Épernon jumped out of bed and began to efface, as well as he could, the stains of blood on his boots and doublet.

This occupation brought back to his mind the scene in the Place de la Bastille.

"All the blood I have in my body," he said, "would not suffice to satiate that man who, with his own simple arm, shed so much blood to-night."

And he went to bed again.

As for Henri, he led Chicot to his cabinet, and, opening a long ebony coffer lined with white satin:

"Come here," said he, "and look."

"I see," answered Chicot, "swords. Well, what about them?"

"Yes, swords, but swords that have been blessed, my dear friend."

"By whom?"

"By our holy father the pope himself, who has granted me this favor. To send this coffer to Rome and get it back again cost me twenty horses and four men; but I have the swords."

"Are they sharp?"

"Undoubtedly. But their peculiar and highest merit is that they are blessed."

"Oh, I know all that; but I am not the less pleased on that account to learn that they are sharp."

"Pagan!"

"Very well, my son; and now, let us speak of other things."

"As you like; but be quick."

"You want to sleep?"

"No, I want to pray."

"In that case we had better speak of matters of business at once. You have sent for M. d'Anjou?"

"Yes, he is waiting below."

"What do you intend to do with him?"

"Throw him into the Bastile."

"A wise determination. But see to it that his dungeon is very deep and very secure; the sort of a dungeon, for example, that was occupied by the constable Saint Paul or Jacques d'Armagnac."

"Make your mind easy on that point."

"I know where you can purchase the most beautiful black velvet you ever saw, my son."

"Chicot! he is my brother."

"You are correct; of course, at court the family mourning is violet. Do you intend to speak to him?"

"Yes, certainly I shall do so, if only for the purpose of depriving him of all hope by showing him that his plots are discovered."

"Hum!" muttered Chicot.

"Do you think I expose myself to any danger by conversing with him?"

"No; still, if I were in your place, I should cut short the conversation and double the imprisonment."

"Let the Duc d'Anjou be led into my presence," said Henri.

"All the same," said Chicot, "I hold the same opinion still."

A moment later, the duke entered; he was very pale, and without any weapon. Crillon followed, carrying the prince's sword.

"Where did you find him?" the King asked Crillon, speaking as if he were entirely oblivious of the duke's presence.

"Sire, his highness was not at home; but a few moments after I had taken possession of his hôtel in your Majesty's name, his highness returned, and we arrested him; he did not offer any resistance."

"It is very fortunate he did not," said the King, scornfully.

Then turning to the prince:

"Where were you, monsieur?" he inquired.

"Wherever I was, sire," answered the duke, "you may be convinced that I was devoting myself to your Majesty's service."

"Ah! indeed! I suspected as much," answered Henri; "and your answer proves that I was not wrong in doing you the sort of service you would do me."

François bowed, calmly and respectfully.

"Come, now, where were you?" said the King, marching straight up to his brother, "what were you doing during the time your accomplices were being arrested?"

"My accomplices?" asked François.

"Yes, your accomplices," repeated the King.

"Surely your Majesty must have received some information regarding me that is utterly false."

"Oh, this time you shall not escape me, monsieur; your crimes are about to be brought to an end. You are not going to have another chance of succeeding to my throne, my brother" —

"Sire, sire, for mercy's sake, be moderate; some one must certainly have embittered you against me."

"Wretch!" cried Henri, beside himself with rage, "you shall die of hunger in a dungeon in the Bastile."

"I bow to your orders, sire, and bless them, though they should doom me to death."

"But do you refuse to tell me where you were, hypocrite?"

"Sire, I was engaged in the task of defending your Majesty, and was working for the glory and tranquillity of your reign."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the King, almost paralyzed with amazement; "upon my honor, such audacity astounds me!"

"Hum!" said Chicot, throwing himself back in his chair, "tell us all about it, prince; the story ought to be curious."

"Sire, I would have told your Majesty the whole affair already, had you treated me as a brother; now that you treat me as a criminal, I will wait until the result of my actions speak for me."

Then with a salutation to the King, more profound and reverential than the one before, he turned to Crillon and the other officers present:

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "which of you is to conduct the first prince of the blood of France to the Bastile?"

Chicot had been reflecting: a sudden thought flashed through his mind.

"Aha!" he murmured, "I think I understand now why M. D'Épernon had so much blood on his feet and so little in his cheeks."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE MORNING OF THE COMBAT.

A BEAUTIFUL day rose over Paris. The ordinary citizen never suspected that it would be a day marked by any unusual incident; but the gentlemen of the King's party and the gentlemen of the Duc de Guise's party — the latter still in a dazed condition — were perfectly aware of what was going to happen and were already prudently preparing to offer timely congratulations to the side that would be victorious.

The King, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, did not sleep during the night: he wept and prayed; and as, with all his faults, he was a brave man, versed in war, and with a special knowledge of everything connected with duelling, he rose at three in the morning and started with Chicot to render his friends the only service he could render them now.

He went to visit the ground where the combat was to take place.

This expedition of the King was very noticeable, and, let us say so without being accused of jesting, — very little noticed.

Clad in a costume of sombre hue, enveloped in a large cloak, his sword by his side, and his hat slouched down over his hair and eyes, he followed the Rue Saint-Antoine until he came within a hundred yards of the Bastile; but when at that point, he remarked that there was a great crowd of people above the Rue Saint-Paul; he did not care to venture among this crowd; so he turned into the Rue Sainte-Catherine and reached the paddock at Les Tournelles by a back way.

What the crowd were doing may be guessed; they were counting the dead of the night before.

Henri, by keeping at a distance from this excited multitude, missed an opportunity of learning what had occurred.

Chicot, who had been present at the quarrel, or rather at the agreement, made between the minions and Angevines a week before, pointed out to the King, upon the field of battle itself, the places to be occupied by the combatants and explained to him the conditions of the combat.

Henri was so busy measuring the spaces, looking between the trees, and calculating the position of the sun, that he hardly attended to him.

"Quélus," said he, "will be badly exposed; he will have the sun on his right, just in his only eye;[1] while Maugiron will be entirely in the shade. Quélus ought to have taken Maugiron's place, and Maugiron, who has excellent eyes, that of Quélus. Matters have been very badly managed so far. As for Schomberg, who is somewhat weak in the legs, he has a tree which he can lean against in case of need. I am not alarmed, then, about him; but Quélus, my poor Quélus!"

And he shook his head sadly.

"You really make me feel uncomfortable, my King," said Chicot. "Come, now, do not give way to despair in this fashion; what the devil! whatever is to be will be."

The King raised his eyes to heaven and sighed.

"Thou hearest, O Lord, how he blasphemes," he murmured, "but happily thou knowest he is a fool."

Chicot at this drew himself up.

"And D'Épernon," continued the King; "ah! how unjust I am! I never thought of him; and he will be Bussy's opponent, too; look how he will be exposed, my dear Chicot! look at the lie of the ground: on his left, a barrier; on his right, a tree, and a ditch behind him; and D'Épernon will have to give way every moment, for Bussy is a lion, a tiger, a serpent; he is a living sword that leaps forward, springs back, expands, contracts."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "I have no anxiety about D'Épernon."

"You are wrong, he will get killed."

"He! not such a booby; he 'll take good care of himself, you may rest assured."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that he won't fight, *mordieu!*"

"Nonsense! did n't you hear what he said an hour ago?"

"Plainly."

"Well?"

"Well, it 's because I heard what he said that I say he won't fight."

"What a cynical sceptic you are!"

"I know my Gascon, Henri; but if you take my advice, sire, we 'll get away from here and return to the Louvre; you see it is broad daylight."

"You don't imagine I am going to stay in the Louvre during the combat?"

[1] Quélus had lost his left eye in a duel.

"*Ventre de biche!* but you must. Why, if you were to be seen here, every one would say, in case your friends were victorious, that they owed their victory to certain magical practices of yours, and, if they were conquered, they were so because you brought them bad luck."

"And what care I for such gossip and calumny; I will show my love for them even to the end."

"I'm not going to quarrel with you having a strong mind, Henri; I think even I ought to compliment you on your affection for your friends, it is a virtue that is very seldom found among princes; but I do not wish you to leave M. d'Anjou by himself in the Louvre."

"Is not Crillon there?"

"Crillon? Oh, Crillon is simply a buffalo, a rhinoceros, a wild boar, everything that is valorous and indomitable; while your brother is a viper, a rattlesnake, is any animal you like whose power lies less in its strength than in its venom."

"You are right; I should have thrown him into the Bastile."

"I told you you did wrong to see him."

"I know it, but his assurance, his coolness, and the service he claims to have rendered me got the better of me."

"The more reason why you should have distrusted him. But take my word for it, Henri, we ought to return."

Henri followed Chicot's advice and started with him on the way to the Louvre, after giving one last look at the field of combat.

Everybody was up in the Louvre when the King and Chicot entered.

The four young men were the first to awaken and were now being dressed by their valets.

The King inquired what they were doing.

He was told Schomberg was practising with his rapier, Quélus was bathing his eye, Maugiron was drinking a glass of Spanish wine, and D'Épernon was sharpening his sword on a stone.

He could be seen at this task, having ordered a sandstone to be brought to the door of the common room for the purpose.

"And you say that man is not a Bayard?" said Henri, gazing at him fondly.

"Yes, I say that he is a knife-grinder, and that's the end of it," retorted Chicot.

D'Épernon looked up and cried: "The King!"

Then, in spite of the resolution he had taken, and which, in any case, he would have hardly had the strength to keep, Henri entered the chamber.

We have already stated that he had, when he liked, a most majestic mien, as well as great self-control.

His serene and almost smiling countenance did not betray the feelings of his heart.

"Good day, gentlemen," said he; "I hope I find you in good spirits."

"Thank God! yes, sire," answered Quélus.

"Still, I fancy you look rather gloomy, Maugiron."

"Sire, I am very superstitious, as your Majesty is aware; I had bad dreams last night; so I am drinking a little wine to restore my cheerfulness."

"My dear friend," said the King, "you ought to remember — and I have the authority of Miron, who is a great doctor, for what I say — you ought to remember, I repeat, that dreams are the impressions of the previous day and have no influence on the actions of the morrow, except, of course, by the will of God."

"Consequently, sire, you find me preparing for the combat," said D'Épernon; "I, too, had bad dreams last night; but, in spite of dreams, my arm is strong and my eye clear."

And he fenced against the wall, in which he made a cut with the sword he had just whetted.

"Yes," said Chicot, "you dreamed you had blood on your boots. That dream is not bad; it signifies that you will one day be a great conqueror, after the manner of Alexander and Cæsar."

"My brave friends," said Henri, "you know that the honor of your prince is at stake, since, in a certain sense, it is his cause that you defend; but his honor only — do not be mistaken on that point — therefore, give yourselves no concern about the safety of my person. The events of the past night have so strengthened my throne that, for some time at least, no shock, however violent, can harm it. Fight, then, for the sake of honor alone."

"Sire, you need not be uneasy," answered Quélus, "we may, perhaps, lose our lives, but our honor will remain intact."

"Gentlemen," continued the King, "I love you tenderly, and I esteem you also. Let me, then, give you one advice: no false bravery; it is not by dying that you can serve me, but by killing your enemies."

"Oh, as far as I am concerned," said D'Épernon, "I do not intend to give quarter."

"I," said Quélus, "will promise nothing; I will do what I can."

"And I," said Maugiron, "will promise your Majesty that, if I am to die, I shall first kill my adversary."

"Do you fight with the sword alone?"

"With sword and dagger," answered Schomberg.

The King pressed his hand on his heart.

The hand and heart that then met may have told each other of their fears by their shuddering pulsations; but, externally, Henri's bearing was high, his eye tearless, and his lips haughty; he was, indeed, every inch a king, and looked as if he were sending his soldiers to battle, not his friends to death.

"In good sooth, my King," said Chicot, "at this moment you seem truly royal."

The gentlemen were ready; it only remained for them to bid farewell to their master.

"Do you ride to the ground?" inquired Henri.

"No, sire," answered Quélus, "we walk; it is a healthful exercise, it clears the head, and your Majesty has often said that it is the head rather than the arm which directs the sword."

"You are right, my son. Your hand."

Quélus inclined and kissed the King's hand; the others did the same.

D'Épernon knelt, saying:

"Sire, bless my sword."

"No, D'Épernon," said the King; "hand your sword to your page. I have better swords for you than your own; bring the swords here, Chicot."

"No," said the Gascon, "give this commission to the captain of your guards, my son; I am but a fool, you know, and a pagan also; and the celestial benedictions might change into fatal incantations, if my good friend the devil chanced to look at my hands and saw what they were carrying."

"What swords are these, sire?" inquired Schomberg, glancing at the box which an officer had brought in.

"Italian swords, my son; swords forged at Milan, basket-hilted, as you see; and as, with the exception of Schomberg, you all have delicate hands, you could be easily disarmed if your hands were not well protected."

"Thanks, thanks, your Majesty," said the four young men in unison.

"Go, it is time," said the King, who could no longer control his emotion.

"Sire," asked Quélus, "shall we not have your Majesty's presence to encourage us?"

"No, that would not be seemly; you will be supposed to fight without my sanction and even without my knowledge. Nor must we attach any peculiar or solemn significance to the combat; it must be thought to be the result of a private quarrel."

And he dismissed them with a gesture that was truly majestic.

When they had vanished from his presence, and their valets had crossed the threshold of the Louvre, and the noise of the spurs and cuirasses worn by their squires was no longer heard, Henri flung himself on a dais, saying:

"This will kill me."

"Well," said Chicot, "I am determined to see this duel; I don't know why, but I have a notion that something queer will happen with respect to D'Épernon."

"And you, too, are leaving me, Chicot?" said the King, dismally.

"Yes," answered Chicot; "for if any of them fail in his duty, I wish to be there, so as to take his place and sustain the honor of my King."

"Go, then," said Henri.

As soon as the Gascon received permission to depart, he was off like a shot.

The King returned to his chamber, ordered all the shutters to be closed, and forbade any person in the Louvre to utter a cry or a word. To Crillon, who knew everything that was about to happen, he said:

"If we are the victors, Crillon, you will tell me so; if, on the contrary, we are vanquished, you will knock thrice at my door."

"Yes, sire," answered Crillon, shaking his head.

CHAPTER XCVI.

BUSSY'S FRIENDS.

Like the friends of the King, the friends of the Duc d'Anjou had also slept soundly during the night.

After a hearty supper, during which, however, their master had not honored them with either his advice or presence, for François did not by any means take the same anxious interest in his favorites that Henri took in his minions, they retired to comfortable couches in Antraguet's hôtel; they had decided to meet in this mansion on account of its proximity to the field of battle.

Ribeirac's squire, a great hunter and a clever armorer, had spent the whole day in cleaning, furbishing, and sharpening their weapons.

He was also ordered to waken the young men at daybreak, an office he was in the habit of discharging for his master on the morning of every festival, hunt, or duel.

Before supper Antraguet had gone to visit a little shopgirl in the Rue Saint-Denis whom he idolized. Ribeirac had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will.

At the stroke of three, that is to say, at an hour when the King's friends were hardly yet awake, they were all on their feet, fresh and brisk, and already armed.

They had put on red breeches and red stockings, so that their enemies might not see their blood, and that they might not be frightened by it themselves. They wore doublets of gray silk, so that, should they fight entirely dressed, their movements might not be embarrassed by the folds of a coarser material; finally, they were shod in shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords, to save their arms and shoulders from all unnecessary fatigue.

It was glorious weather for love or war or walking; a brilliant sun gilded the gables of the roofs, upon which the dew-drops of the previous night were still sparkling.

An odor at once pungent and delicious, rose from the gardens and was diffused through the streets. The pavement was dry and the air bracing.

Before leaving the house, the young men had sent a messenger to the Duc d'Anjou to inquire for Bussy.

The messenger was to find out whether he had left the hôtel alone and armed.

He was informed that he had gone out, accompanied by Rémy, and that both of them had their swords.

He was also told at the count's hôtel that no one was disturbed by his absence. He often absented himself in this way; but he was known to be so brave, strong, and adroit that, no matter how long he stayed away, his people felt little anxiety on his account.

All these details were repeated to his three friends.

"Oh, I understand," said Antraguet. "You have heard, gentlemen, have you not, that the King has ordered a great stag-hunt in the forest of Compiègne, and that M. de Monsoreau was to leave Paris yesterday?"

"Yes," answered the young men.

"Then I know where he is: while the grand huntsman is rousing the stag, he is chasing the grand huntsman's doe. Do not be uneasy, gentlemen, he is nearer to us than you imagine, and will be on the ground before us."

"Yes," said Livarot, "but he is sure to be worried and fatigued after a sleepless night."

Antraguet shrugged his shoulders.

"Bussy fatigued?" he answered; "nonsense! Come along, gentlemen, we 'll call for him on our way."

And all started.

It was just at the very moment when Henri was distributing the swords to their enemies; and so they were ten minutes in advance of the latter.

As Antraguet's hôtel was near Saint-Eustache, they took the Rue des Lombards, the Rue de la Verrerie, and, finally, the Rue Saint-Antoine.

All these streets were deserted. The peasants who came from Montreuil, Vincennes, and Saint-Maur-les-Fossés with their milk and vegetables, and who were dozing on their carts and mules, were the only persons that had the privilege of seeing this group of proud and valiant gentlemen, followed by their three pages and their three squires.

There were now neither bravadoes, nor cries, nor threats; they knew they must fight to a finish, kill or be killed; they knew that, on both sides, the duel would be furious, deadly, merciless, and such knowledge makes men thoughtful; on that morning the giddiest of the trio was the most pensive.

When they reached the top of the Rue Saint-Catherine, all three turned their eyes in the direction of Monsoreau's little house, with a smile that indicated the existence of the same thought in each of their minds.

"The ground can be easily seen from yonder," said Antraguet, "and I have no doubt poor Diane will look out of her window more than once."

"Hold on," exclaimed Ribeirac, "she is there already, if I be not deceived."

"Why do you think so?"

"It is open."

"True. But why is that ladder hanging from the balcony when the building has doors?"

"I fact, it 's queer," said Antraguet.

All three approached the house with an inward presentiment that they were drawing near to some important discovery.

"And we are not the only people to be astonished," said Livarot. "Look at yon peasants who stand up in their wagons as they pass to peer into the house."

The young men were now under the balcony.

A market-gardener was there before them and seemed to be examining the ground at his feet.

"Ho, there! Seigneur de Monsoreau," cried Antraguet, "do you intend to come and witness the fight? You had better make haste, for we wish to be the first on the ground."

They waited in vain for an answer.

"There is no reply," said Ribeirac; "but what the devil is the meaning of that ladder?"

"I say, you fellow," said Livarot to the market-gardener, "was it you that threw up that ladder there?"

"God forbid, gentlemen!" he answered.

"And why so?" inquired Antraguet.

"Look up."

The three young men raised their heads.

"Blood!" cried Ribeirac.

"Faith, yes, blood," said the villager, "and very black blood, too."

"The door has been forced," said Antraguet's page at the same moment.

Antraguet glanced at the door and window, and, seizing the ladder, was on the balcony in an instant.

He looked into the chamber.

"What has happened?" asked the others, who saw him stagger and turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer.

Livarot had climbed up behind him.

"Dead bodies! death, death everywhere!" he shouted.

And both entered the room.

Ribeirac remained below, fearing a surprise.

During this time the cries of the market-gardener arrested the footsteps of all who were going by.

The chamber bore in all parts the traces of the terrible struggle that had occurred on the night before. Stains or rather streams of blood were on the floor. The hangings had been hacked by swords and riddled by bullets. The furniture, shattered and soiled with blood, was strewn over the apartment, intermingled with fragments of flesh and clothing.

"Oh! Rémy! poor Rémy!" said Antraguet, suddenly.

"Dead?" asked Livarot.

"Already cold."

"Why, a regiment of reiters must have passed through this room!" exclaimed Livarot.

Then Livarot saw that the door of the corridor was open. Spots of blood showed that on this side also there had been a struggle; he followed the hideous traces before him and came to the staircase.

The courtyard was empty and solitary.

Meanwhile, Antraguet, instead of following him, went to the next room; there was blood everywhere, and this blood reached as far as the window. He leaned out and gazed with terrified eyes into the little garden.

The spikes of the iron trellis still held fast the livid and rigid body of the unfortunate Bussy.

At this sight it was not a cry, but a roar, that escaped from the breast of Antraguet.

Livarot ran up.

"Look," said Antraguet, "Bussy dead!"

"Bussy assassinated and flung from the window! Come in, Ribeirac, come in!"

During this time, Livarot started for the court-yard, and, meeting Ribeirac at the bottom of the stairs, took him with him.

A little door led from the courtyard to the garden, and they passed through.

"It is indeed he!" cried Livarot.

"And his wrist is hacked," said Ribeirac.

"And he has two bullets in his chest."

"He has been stabbed by daggers in every part of his body."

"Ah! poor Bussy!" howled Antraguet; "vengeance! vengeance!"

Turning round, Livarot's foot came in contact with another corpse.

"Monsoreau!" he exclaimed.

"What! Monsoreau, too?"

"Yes, with as many holes in him as in a sieve, and with his head shattered by the pavement."

"Why, all our friends have been murdered last night!"

"And his wife, his wife," cried Antraguet; "Diane, Madame Diane!"

But there was no answer, except an exclamation of horror now and then from the people who began to swarm around the house.

This was the moment when the King and Chicot had reached the top of the Rue Sainte-Catherine and turned away to avoid the crowd.

"Bussy! poor Bussy!" cried Ribeirac, in despair.

"Yes," said Antraguet, "they were determined to get rid of the most terrible enemy they had amongst us."

"Oh! what dastards and caitiffs!" cried the two other young men."

"Let us go and complain to the duke," cried one of them.

"No," said Antraguet, "the work of vengeance is for ourselves alone; otherwise, my friend, we should be but poorly avenged; wait for me."

In a second he descended and joined Livarot and Rebeirac.

"Look, my friends," said he, "at the noble face of the bravest of men, behold the still ruddy drops of his blood; he has set us an example; he never charged others with the task of avenging his wrongs. Bussy! Bussy! we will act like thee, and be assured we will avenge thee."

Then he uncovered, pressed his lips to Bussy's lips, and drawing his sword bathed it in Bussy's blood.

"Bussy," said he, "I swear on thy dead body that this blood shall be laved in the blood of thy enemies!"

"Bussy," said the others, "we swear to kill them or die!"

"Gentlemen," said Antraguet, sheathing his sword, "no mercy, no quarter; do you agree?"

"No mercy, no quarter," they repeated.

"But," said Livarot, "we shall now be only three against four."

"Yes, but we have not committed murder," said Antraguet, "and God will strengthen the innocent. Adieu, Bussy!"

"Adieu, Bussy," repeated his companions.

And they passed out from that accursed house, pale and horror-stricken.

They had there found, along with the image of death, the desperation that multiplies the strength of man a hundred fold; they had there been inspired with that generous indignation which renders a human being superior to his mortal essence.

The crowd had become so large during the past quarter of an hour that they had some difficulty in forcing their way through it.

On arriving at the ground, they saw that their antagonists were waiting for them, some sitting on stones, others in picturesque attitudes on the wooden barriers.

Then they ran forward, ashamed of being the last to reach the paddock.

The four minions had with them four squires.

Their four swords, lying on the ground, seemed to be, like themselves, waiting and resting.

"Gentlemen," said Quélus, rising and bowing with a sort of stately arrogance, "we have had the honor of waiting for you."

"Excuse us, gentlemen," answered Antraguet; "we should have been here before you had we not been delayed by one of our companions."

"M. de Bussy?" inquired D'Épernon; "in fact, I do not see him. Apparently he is not much in a hurry this morning."

"Well, as we have waited until now," said Schomberg, "we can easily wait a little longer."

"M. de Bussy will not come," answered Antraguet.

Profound amazement was painted on every face. D'Épernon's alone expressed a different feeling.

"He will not come?" said he; "oho! the bravest of the brave is afraid, then, is he?"

"No, that cannot be the reason," returned Quélus.

"You are right, monsieur," said Livarot.

"But why will he not come?" asked Maugiron.

"Because he is dead," answered Antraguet.

"Dead!" cried the minions.

D'Épernon did not speak, but turned slightly pale.

"And dead because assassinated!" replied Antraguet. "You are not aware of it, gentlemen?"

"No," said Quélus, "and why should we be?"

"Besides, are you quite sure?" asked D'Épernon.

Antraguet drew his rapier.

"As sure," said he, "as that the blood upon my sword is his blood."

"Assassinated!" cried all the King's friends except D'Épernon. "M. de Bussy assassinated!"

D'Épernon still shook his head, with an air of doubt.

"This blood cries aloud for vengeance," said Ribeirac; "do you not hear it, gentlemen?"

"Oh, I see!" returned Schomberg, "your grief covers a certain insinuation, apparently."

"Suppose it does?"

"What does all this mean?" cried Quélus.

"'*Search for him to whom the crime is profitable,*' the legislator says," murmured Livarot.

"Come, gentlemen, explain what you mean clearly and frankly," cried Maugiron, in a voice of thunder.

"That is just what we are here for, gentlemen," said Ribeirac, "and we have now more cause for cutting your throats than ever."

"Then to it quick! draw your swords," said D'Épernon, unsheathing his; "to it at once."

"Oh! what a hurry you are in, Mister Gascon!" said Livarot. "You didn't crow quite so loud when we were four against four."

"Is it our fault if you are now only three?" answered D'Épernon.

"Yes, it is your fault," cried Antraguet. "He is dead, because you would rather have him lying in the tomb than standing here before you; he is dead, with his hand mangled, in order that that hand might no longer hold a sword; he is dead, because you were determined at any price, that those eyes should be sightless whose lightning would have blinded the whole four of you. Do you understand? Do I make my meaning clear?"

Schomberg, D'Épernon, and Maugiron howled with rage.

"Enough, gentlemen, enough," said Quélus. "Withdraw, M. D'Épernon, we will fight three against three. These gentlemen shall see if, notwithstanding our right, we are men to take advantage of a misfortune which we deplore as much as they do. Come, gentlemen," added the young man, flinging his hat behind him and raising his left hand, while with his right he swept his sword through the air so that it hissed. "Come, and when you see us fighting under the open sky and beneath the eye of God, you will then be able to judge if we be assassins. To your posts, gentlemen! to your posts!"

"Ah! I hated you before," said Schomberg, "now I execrate you."

"And an hour ago I would have killed you," said Antraguet, "now I would cut you into pieces. On guard! gentlemen, on guard!"

"With doublets or without?" asked Schomberg.

"Without either doublet or shirt," said Antraguet; "with breasts bare and hearts uncovered."

The young men laid aside their doublets and pulled off their shirts.

"Stay!" said Quélus, as he was undressing, "I have lost my dagger. It was loose in the sheath and must have fallen on the way."

"Or, perhaps, you left it at M. de Monsoreau's house in the Place de Bastille, and did not dare to draw it from its sheath," said Antraguet.

Quélus uttered a cry of rage and fell into position.

"But he has no dagger, M. Antraguet, he has no dagger," cried Chicot, who had just arrived on the field of battle.

"So much the worse for him," answered Antraguet; "it is not my fault."

And, drawing his dagger with his left hand, he fell into position also.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE COMBAT.

The ground where this terrible duel was to be fought was, as we have already stated, sheltered by trees. It was secluded, and usually frequented only by children, who came to play there during the day, or by drunkards and thieves, who came to sleep there during the night.

The barriers, erected by the horsedealers, naturally kept off the crowd, for a crowd, like the waves in a river, follows the current of the stream and does not stop or veer from it unless it is strongly attracted by some contrary current.

As a rule, the wayfarer preferred going round the enclosure to passing through it.

Moreover, it was very early, and people were too eager to hurry to the blood-stained house of Monsoreau to think of anything else.

Chicot, whose heart was beating fast, although he was not of a very tender disposition, sat in front of the pages and lackeys on a wooden railing.

He was not fond of the Angevines and he detested the minions; but they were all brave young fellows, and through their veins there coursed a generous blood which would soon, probably, stream forth before his eyes under the light of day.

D'Épernon risked a last bravado.

"What! are they all afraid of me, then?" he cried.

"Hold your tongue, babbler," said Antraguet.

"I want my rights," answered D'Épernon. "It was to be a party of eight, and I was to be one of them."

"Keep off, I say!" said Ribeirac, angrily, barring his passage.

He turned back, and, making a vain attempt to look like a disappointed hero, sheathed his sword.

"Come," said Chicot, "come away, O flower of valor, or you may lose another pair of shoes, as you did yesterday."

"What is this buffoon saying?"

"I say that there will be soon blood on the ground, and you are sure to walk in it, as you did last night."

D'Épernon turned livid. His effrontery could not hold out against this terrible attack.

He sat ten yards away from Chicot, looking now and then at him fearfully.

Ribeirac and Schomberg approached each other, after the customary salute.

Quélus and Antraguet, who were already on guard, crossed steel, after taking a step forward.

Maugiron and Livarot contented themselves with feinting and watching each the sword-play of his adversary.

The combat began when the clock of Saint-Paul's struck five.

Fury was depicted on the faces of the combatants; but their tightly pressed lips, the menacing pallor of their faces, the involuntary trembling of their wrists, indicated that this fury was a force which it was prudent to retain in all its violence, for when once unchained, like a fiery steed freed from the curb, it would create great devastation in its course.

For several minutes — an enormous space of time on such an occasion — there was a friction rather than a clashing of swords.

Not a stroke was given.

Ribeirac, fatigued, or rather satisfied with his trial of his adversary's style, lowered his hand and waited for a moment.

Schomberg took two rapid steps forward; his sword gleamed like a flash of lightning from the bosom of a cloud. It was the first stroke.

Ribeirac was hit.

His skin turned livid, and a jet of blood spurted from his shoulder; he fell back to examine the wound.

Schomberg endeavored to repeat the stroke; but Ribeirac struck up his sword, parried in prime, and wounded him in the side.

Each of them, then, had his wound.

"Now let us rest for a few seconds, if you have no objection," said Ribeirac.

Meanwhile, Quélus and Antraguet were hotly at work on their side; but Quélus, having no dagger, was at a great disadvantage; he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and, as this arm was bare, every parry cost him a wound.

Although he was not seriously injured, his hand, in a few seconds, was entirely covered with blood.

Antraguet, who saw his advantage, and who was quite as adroit as Quélus, parried with extreme wariness.

With three parries and thrusts he wounded Quélus thrice in the breast.

But Quélus was not mortally hurt, although streams of blood ran down his body, and, every time he was touched, he repeated:

"It is nothing."

Livarot and Maugiron were still engaged in their cautious play.

As for Ribeirac, mad with pain, and feeling that with his loss of blood he was losing his strength, he made a sudden leap at Schomberg.

Schomberg did not recoil a step and simply stretched out his sword.

Both of the young men made several stealthy thrusts at each other.

Ribeirac was pierced through the breast, and Schomberg was wounded in the neck.

Ribeirac's wound was mortal; he applied his left hand to it, thereby uncovering himself.

Schomberg took advantage of the opportunity and gave him a second thrust which penetrated his side.

But Ribeirac with his right hand grasped the hand of his adversary, and with his left plunged his dagger into his breast up to the hilt.

The blade passed through the heart.

Schomberg uttered a hollow groan and fell on his back, dragging down Ribeirac, still pierced by the sword.

Livarot, seeing his friend fall, retreated a step, and then ran quickly, pursued by Maugiron, to his aid.

He gained on his pursuer, and, helping Ribeirac in his efforts to free himself from Schomberg's sword, he pulled it from his breast.

But Maugiron was now near him, and he was obliged to fight him with the disadvantage of a slippery ground, an imperfect guard, and the glare of the sun in his eyes.

At the end of a second, Maugiron pierced the head of Livarot, who dropped his sword and fell on his knees.

Quélus was closely pressed by Antraguet. Maugiron stabbed Livarot a second time, and the latter fell flat on the ground.

D'Épernon uttered a loud cry.

And now Antraguet had to face both Quélus and Maugiron. Quélus was covered with blood, but his wounds were slight.

Maugiron was as yet almost scathless.

Antraguet saw his peril; he had not received even a scratch; but he was beginning to feel fatigued. It was not the moment, however, to ask for a truce from one man who was wounded and from another who was hot for carnage. With a rapid movement he violently thrust aside the sword of Quélus and jumped lightly over a barrier.

Quélus wheeled round and dealt him a blow, but it only cut into the wood.

At the same moment, Maugiron attacked Antraguet behind. The latter turned round.

Quélus profited by this movement to creep under the barrier.

"He is lost!" thought Chicot.

"Long live the King!" cried D'Épernon; "at him! my lions, at him!"

"Silence, if you please, monsieur," said Antraguet. "Do not insult a man who will fight till his last breath."

"And a man who is not yet dead," cried Livarot.

And, at the very moment when no one was any longer thinking of him, Livarot rose upon his knees, hideous with the bloody mire that covered his body, and plunged his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who fell like a log, sighing:

"Jesus! O God! I am slain."

Livarot fell back in a swoon; his last action and his rage had exhausted all the strength that was left in him.

"M. de Quélus," said Antraguet, lowering his sword, "you are a brave man; yield, and I offer you your life."

"And why should I yield?" said Quélus; "am I lying on the ground?"

"No, but you are covered with wounds, and I am safe and sound."

"Long live the King! I have still my sword, monsieur."

And he made a cut at Antraguet, who parried the stroke, sudden though it was.

"No, monsieur, you have it no longer," said the latter, seizing the blade near the hilt.

And he twisted the arm of his adversary, who dropped the sword.

But, while doing so, Antraguet slightly cut one of the fingers of his left hand.

"Oh!" groaned Quélus, "a sword! a sword!"

And leaping like a tiger on Antraguet, he caught him in his arms.

Antraguet made no endeavor to free himself, but changing his sword from his right hand to his left, and his dagger from his left hand to his right, he stabbed him repeatedly in every part of his body, daubing him at each stroke with blood; yet he could not force his enemy to let go his hold; after every wound Quélus shouted: "Long live the King!"

He even managed to secure the hand that stabbed him, and coiled round his enemy with arms and legs like a serpent.

Antraguet felt that his breath would soon fail him.

In fact, after a second or so, he reeled and fell.

But, as if everything was to be in his favor on this day, he fell on top of Quélus, almost stifling the unfortunate young man.

"Long live the King!" murmured the latter, in tones of agony.

Antraguet succeeded at last in getting out of the clutch of his enemy, and, leaning on his arm, he drove the dagger into his chest, piercing him through and through.

"Well!" said he to him, "are you satisfied now?"

"Long live the" — articulated Quélus, his eyes fast closing.

All was finished; the silence and terror of death reigned over the field of battle.

Antraguet rose; he was covered with blood, but it was the blood of his enemy; as we have said, he himself had only had a scratch.

D'Épernon, horror-stricken, made the sign of the cross, and fled as if pursued by a spectre.

Antraguet looked at friends and enemies, the dead and the dying, as Horatius must have looked at the field of battle that decided the fate of Rome.

Chicot ran up and raised Quélus, whose blood was gushing forth from nineteen wounds.

The movement roused him.

He opened his eyes.

"Antraguet, upon my honor," said he, "I am innocent of Bussy's death."

"Oh! I believe you, monsieur, I believe you," answered Antraguet, much affected.

"Fly," murmured Quélus, "fly; the King would never forgive you."

"No, monsieur, I will not abandon you thus, though the scaffold be my portion."

"Escape at once, young man," said Chicot, "and do not tempt God. You have already escaped by a miracle; do not expect a second one the same day."

Antraguet approached Ribeirac, who was still breathing.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"We have conquered," answered Antraguet, in a whisper, so as not to offend Quélus.

"Thanks," said Ribeirac. "And now get away from here."

And he fell back fainting.

Antraguet picked up his own sword, which he had dropped during the conflict, then the swords of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron.

"Finish me, monsieur," said Quélus, "or else leave me my sword."

"Here it is, M. le Comte," answered Antraguet, offering it to him with a respectful bow.

A tear glistened in the eyes of the wounded man.

"We ought to have been friends," he murmured.

Antraguet tendered him his hand.

"It is well!" observed Chicot; "nothing could be more chivalrous and noble. But you must escape, Antraguet; you deserve to live."

"And my companions?" inquired the young man.

"I will take as much care of them as of the King's friends."

Antraguet wrapped himself up in a cloak which was handed to him by his squire, so that no one might see the blood with which he was covered, and, leaving the dead and wounded with the pages and lackeys, he disappeared through the Porte Saint-Antoine.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

CONCLUSION.

The King, pale with anxiety, and shuddering at every sound, paced the floor of his armory, calculating, with all the experience of a man who was at home in such matters, the time it would take his friends to meet and engage their adversaries, as well as all the good and evil possibilities that might be augured from their temperament, strength, and address.

"They are now crossing the Rue Saint-Antoine," was his first thought.

"By this time they are entering the lists," he muttered, when some minutes had elapsed.

And after an interval:

"Ha! their swords are unsheathed; the combat is on at last!"

And then the poor monarch, trembling with fear, fell upon his knees.

But the prayer he uttered came rather from his lips than from his heart, which was almost entirely absorbed in thoughts that had little to do with devotion.

At the end of a few seconds, the King rose.

"If Quélus," said he, "only remember the peculiar parry and thrust I showed him — the parry with the sword and the thrust with the dagger at the same time.

"As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac. Maugiron will be very unlucky if he does not easily make away with Livarot. But D'Épernon! ah! he is lost! Fortunately, he is the one of the four whom I love least. Alas! his death will not be the only calamity; it will leave Bussy, the terrible Bussy, at full liberty to fall on the others. Ah! my poor Quélus! my poor Schomberg! my poor Maugiron!"

"Sire!" said Crillon, outside the door.

"What! already?" exclaimed the King.

"No, sire, the only news I have for your Majesty is that the Duc d'Anjou requests an audience of your Majesty."

"For what purpose?" asked the King, still speaking through the door.

"He says the moment has come for him to inform your Majesty of the service he has rendered you, and that what he has to say will partly allay your apprehensions at the present moment."

"Well, bring him here," said the King.

But, just as Crillon was returning in pursuance of the royal orders, a rapid step was heard on the stairs, and a voice cried to Crillon:

"I must speak to the King immediately."

The King recognized the voice and opened the door himself.

"Come in, Saint-Luc, come in," he said. "What has hap-

pened now? Why, good heavens! what is the matter with you? Have you been told that they are dead?"

But Saint-Luc, without hat or sword, his face pale and his clothes spotted with blood, instead of answering the King, hurried into the centre of the hall.

"Sire!" he cried, flinging himself on his knees at the feet of the monarch. "Vengeance! I have come to ask for vengeance!"

"My poor Saint-Luc," said the King, "what is the meaning of all this? Speak. Why do you give way to such despair?"

"Sire, the noblest of your subjects, the bravest of your soldiers" — Here his voice failed him.

"Eh?" inquired Crillon, advancing a few steps, for Crillon believed he had certain rights, and a right to the last title, particularly.

"Was murdered last night, traitorously murdered, assassinated!" Saint-Luc was able to say at last with some effort.

The King, whose mind was entirely engrossed by one idea, felt reassured: it was not one of his four friends, since he had seen them all this morning.

"Murdered, assassinated, last night," said Henri. "Of whom are you speaking, pray?"

"Sire," continued Saint-Luc, "I am well aware you did not like him; but he was loyal, and I swear to you he would, if needful, have shed every drop of his blood for your Majesty; otherwise, he would not have been my friend."

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, who was beginning to understand.

And something like a gleam of hope, if not of joy, flitted across his face.

"Vengeance!" cried Saint-Luc, "vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy!"

"For M. de Bussy?" repeated the King, dwelling on every syllable.

"Yes, for M. de Bussy, butchered by twenty assassins last night. And it was well for some of them that they were twenty: he killed fourteen."

"M. de Bussy dead!"

"Yes, sire."

"Then he does not fight this morning," said the King, suddenly, carried away by an impulse he could not resist.

The King was not able to endure the glance that Saint-Luc

hurled at him; on turning away his eyes, he saw Crillon, who was still standing near the door and waiting for new orders.

He made a sign to him to bring in the Duc d'Anjou.

"No, sire, he will not fight," answered Saint-Luc, sternly, "and so I have come to demand not vengeance — I was wrong to use the word before your Majesty — but justice; for I love my King, and I prize his honor above all things else in the world, and I believe that they who have murdered M. de Bussy have rendered a deplorable service to your Majesty."

The Duc d'Anjou was now at the door; he stood calm and impassive, like a statue of bronze.

Saint-Luc's words had enlightened the King; they made clear to him the service which his brother claimed he had rendered him.

His eyes met the duke's, and he had no longer any doubt; the look on the prince's face signified a yes, and this affirmation was emphasized by a scarcely perceptible nod.

"Do you know what people will say now?" cried Saint-Luc. "They will say, should your friends conquer, your favorites owe their victory to the fact that you caused Bussy to be assassinated."

"And who will dare to say that, monsieur?" asked the King.

"Everybody, by God!" said Crillon, taking part bluntly and unceremoniously in the conversation, as was his custom.

"No, monsieur," answered the King, disturbed and overpowered by the opinion of one who was the bravest man in his kingdom, now that Bussy was no more; "no, monsieur, they cannot say that, for you shall name to me the assassin."

Saint-Luc noticed a shadow on the wall. It was that of the Duc d'Anjou, who had advanced into the room. Saint-Luc turned round and recognized him.

"Yes, sire, I will name him!" he cried, rising, "for I wish, at any risk, to show that your Majesty is not responsible for such an abominable deed."

"Well! do so."

The Duc d'Anjou stood quietly waiting.

"Sire, last night a trap was set for Bussy. While he was visiting a woman who loved him, the husband, warned by a traitor, returned home with a band of assassins; these assassins were posted everywhere: in the street, the courtyard, and even in the garden."

If the shutters, as we have related in a previous chapter, had not been closed in the King's apartment, the prince, in spite of his self-control, would have been seen to turn pale at these words.

"Bussy defended himself like a lion, sire, but overwhelmed by numbers, he" —

"He was killed, and justly; I am not going, certainly, to avenge the death of an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished," answered Saint-Luc. "The unfortunate man, after defending himself for nearly half an hour in the chamber, and after triumphing over his enemies, escaped, bleeding, wounded, mutilated. All he required was for some one to offer him a saving hand, which I would have offered him, had I not, along with the woman he confided to my charge, been seized, bound, and gagged by the assassins. Unfortunately for them, they did not deprive me of sight as well as of speech, and I saw, sire, — saw two men approach the unfortunate Bussy, who was suspended by the thigh from the spikes of an iron grating; I heard the wounded man's appeal for help, for he had the right to regard these two men as two friends. Well, sire, one of the two — it is horrible to relate, but, believe me, sire, it was far more horrible to see and to hear — one of the two ordered the other to fire, and that other obeyed."

Crillon clenched his hand and frowned.

"And you know the assassin?" inquired the King, affected, in spite of himself.

"Yes," answered Saint-Luc.

And, turning toward the prince, he said, in tones and with gestures that heightened the intensity of his long-repressed hatred:

"Monseigneur is the assassin! the prince, the friend is the assassin!"

The King had expected the blow, which the duke received without emotion.

"Yes," he said, coolly, "yes, what M. de Saint-Luc says he saw and heard is true; but it was I who had M. de Bussy killed, and your Majesty will appreciate my action, for it is true that M. de Bussy was my servant, but this morning, notwithstanding all my efforts to dissuade him from doing so, M. de Bussy insisted on bearing arms against your Majesty."

"You lie, assassin! you lie!" cried Saint-Luc. "Bussy

pierced by daggers, Bussy with his hands hacked by swords, Bussy with his shoulder shattered by bullets, Bussy hanging by the leg from an iron trellis, Bussy was no longer fit for anything except to excite the pity of his bitterest enemies, and his bitterest enemies would have flown to his aid. But you, the assassin of La Mole and Coconnas, you killed Bussy, as you have killed, one after another, all your friends; you killed Bussy, not because he was your brother's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah! Monsoreau knew well why you committed this crime."

"*Cordieu!*" murmured Crillon, "why am not I the King!"

"I have to submit to insult, and that in your very presence, brother," said the duke, livid with terror, for the deadly hate that shone in Saint-Luc's eyes and the truculent scorn expressed by Crillon's attitude made him feel that he was not safe.

"Withdraw, Crillon," said the King.

Crillon passed out.

"Justice, sire, justice!" Saint-Luc continued to say.

"Yes, sire," said the duke, "punish me for saving your friends this morning and enabling you to ensure a brilliant vindication of your cause, which is also mine."

"And I," cried Saint-Luc, casting all self-restraint to the winds, "I say that any cause which you champion is accursed, and that the wrath of God blasts everything which you touch! Sire, sire! your brother protects our friends — woe to them!"

The King shook with terror.

At this very moment indistinct voices were heard outside, then hurried footsteps, and then eager questions, questions that were followed by a deathlike silence.

In the midst of the silence, as if a voice from heaven had come to confirm Saint-Luc's words, the door trembled under three blows slowly and solemnly struck by the vigorous hand of Crillon.

A cold perspiration stood on Henri's forehead and his features were convulsed with agony.

"Conquered!" he cried, "my poor friends conquered!"

"What did I tell you, sire?" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

The duke wrung his hands in despair.

"Behold, dastard!" cried the young man, in a magnificent outburst of emotion; "behold the manner in which assassinations save the honor of princes! Come, then, and murder me, too; I have no sword!"

And he flung his silk glove into the duke's face.

François shrieked with fury and turned livid.

But the King saw nothing, heard nothing; he dropped his head on his hands and groaned.

"Oh! my poor friends," he murmured, "they are vanquished, wounded! Who will give some reliable tidings of them?"

"I, sire," answered Chicot.

The King recognized the voice of his friend, and held out his arms.

"Well?" said he.

"Two are dead already, and the third is at the last gasp."

"Which of them is the third who is not yet dead?"

"Quélus, sire!"

"And where is he?"

"At the Hôtel de Boissy, where I ordered him to be carried."

The King listened no further, but rushed out of his apartment, uttering piteous cries.

Saint-Luc had taken Diane home to her friend, Jeanne de Brissac; hence his delay in appearing at the Louvre.

Jeanne spent three days and three nights in attendance on the unhappy woman, who was a prey to the most frightful delirium.

On the fourth day, Jeanne, overpowered by fatigue, went to take a little rest. When she returned, two hours later, to her friend's chamber, Diane was no longer there.

It is known that Quélus, the only one of the three defenders of the royal cause that for a time survived his wounds, died in the hôtel to which he had been sent by Chicot, after an agony of thirty days, and in the arms of the King.

Henri was inconsolable.

He erected for his friends three magnificent tombs, on which their effigies were sculptured in marble and in their natural size.

He founded masses for them, asked the prayers of the clergy in their behalf, and added to his usual orisons the following distich, which he repeated every day of his life after his morning and evening prayers:

"O Jesus Christ! have mercy on
Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron!"

For nearly three months Crillon kept watch over the Duc d'Anjou, for whom the King now entertained the deepest hatred, and whom he never forgave.

Matters continued in this way until the month of September, when Chicot, who was always with his master, and who would have consoled him had consolation been possible, received the following letter, dated from the priory of Beaume. It was written by an amanuensis:

"Dear M. Chicot:

"The air is pleasant in this country of ours, and the vintage promises to be very fine in Burgundy this year. I have been told that the King, our sovereign lord, whose life it would seem I saved, is still sorrowful. Bring him with you to the priory, dear M. Chicot. We 'll get him to drink a wine of 1550, which I discovered in my cellar, and which is capable of making those who drink it forget all their troubles, however great they may be; he will be delighted to hear this, I have no doubt, for I have found in the Holy Book this admirable text: 'Good wine rejoiceth the heart of man!' It is very beautiful in Latin. I will show it to you. Come, then, dear M. Chicot; come with the King and M. d'Épernon and M. de Saint-Luc; and you 'll see how we 'll fatten you all up.

"The reverend prior Dom Gorenflot,
"who declares himself your very humble servant and friend.

"P.S. — Please tell the King I have not had time to pray for the souls of his friends as he requested, on account of the trouble my installation has given me; but, as soon as the vintage comes to an end, I will certainly attend to them."

"Amen!" said Chicot. "These poor devils will have a nice sort of a mediator with God when you do!"

END.

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